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ACORN USER

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- Getting your home networked explained
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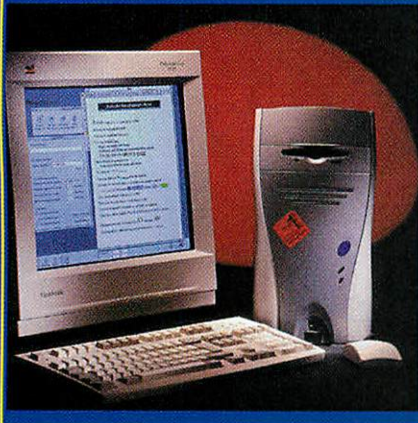




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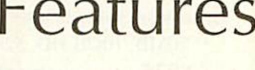






Christmas 2001 ACORN USER





Features

Regulars

January 2002 issue on sale 27th December 2001



It's a PR world. Unfortunately.

On the one hand Microsoft is now in talks with the Office of Fair Trading who are questioning the monopolistic grip that the software giant has on industry in the UK.

The changes to the licensing scheme for Microsoft products is still causing an uproar and Microsoft is attempting to head off the trouble that OFT could put it in. OFT has the power to simply force Microsoft *not* to change the scheme, or fine it heavily if it does.

Meanwhile Microsoft is bidding to make the British government completely dependent on it for all its IT. We all know that Tony and Bill are best buddies but Microsoft already hold the contract to run the Government's Web sites.

Now Billy has been back in the UK being nice to NHS top brass in an effort to take control of the NHS IT future. If someone with the global power of Bill Gates came to have a chat with you (a mere high echelon civil servant) wouldn't you be flattered?

So he is doing his PR best to make himself look like a nice friend to everyone. Meanwhile he forces businesses and governments to upgrade to Windows XP which allows him to control what software is allowed to run on it.

As businesses are forced to invest more and more money in Microsoft it becomes harder to change. Why? Because people hate to be wrong.

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28a Middle Hillgate,
Stockport, Cheshire SK1 3AY
enquiries@acornuser.com
www.acornuser.com
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Editor Steve Turnbull
Production Consultant Alan Jones

Contributors
Mike Cook, David Dade,
Mark Gillard, David Llewelyn-Jones,
Mike Tomkinson, Pam Turnbull

Finance Manager Gary Duxbury
Distribution COMAG (01895) 444055
Production Steve Turnbull
Managing Director Sharon Henderson

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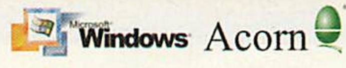
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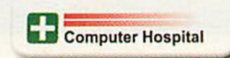
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Full spec. on release

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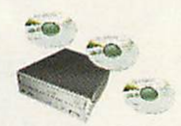


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CD-BURN	**£49.00**	£57.58
CD-SCRIBE 2	**£39.00**	£45.83

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from **£399** + Vat (£468.83) £15.32/month

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50 mip Arm7500 system with 16Mb memory, (HD version & Hard Drive) , built in ZIP drive support, Midi support, 3D sound, & sampler , 10baseT port as standard, RISCOS 4 as standard, High speed serial , High speed parallel, expandable to **256Mb** memory & hard drive / CD-ROM etc.

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From only £143.83 + VAT

(£169.00 inc. VAT)

Basic Model	£143.83	£169.00
With Plus Pack	£169.36	£199.00
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8 MB Machine with 1/2 VGA Screen Built in WP, SS, Diary, Sketch, Jotter, Spellcheck and Internet WWW and E-mail s/w. Psion © Compatable.

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128MB version extra £69.00 (£81.08)

RISC OS 4
only £99 inc VAT

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	ex VAT	inc VAT
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CDR 80min 10 pck	£7.65	£8.99
CDR 80min 25 pck	£17.01	£19.99
CDR/W CD-ROM	£1.28	£1.50
CDR/W 10 pack	£11.00	£12.93
5.2Gb DVD RAM	£25.00	£29.37

Backup Drives

IDE Zip / LS120 require s/w drivers or RiscStation style hardware support.
Parallel Drives inc. RISCOS Software

Zip 100 IDE inc media	**£49.00**	**£57.58**
Zip 250 IDE inc media	**£79.00**	**£92.83**
Zip 250 parallel ext.	£129.00	£151.58
JAZ 2GB SCSI ext.	£235.00	£276.12
JAZ 2GB Parallel ext.	£299.00	£351.32
Orb 2.2 GB IDE	£165.00	£193.87
Orb 2.2 GB Parrallel	£199.00	£233.83
LS120 Media	£4.00	£4.70
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RPC £38.95 inc

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All monitors inc 3 yrs wty unless specified

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ImageM & Twain also available separately

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Growing up Together 2 (CD)	£10.00
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James Pond Underware Agent (Water)	£20.00
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Datafile PD 2 (CD)	£5.00
Datafile PD 4 (CD)	£5.00
Datafile PD 5 (CD)	£10.00
Robert Duncan Cartoon kit (CD)	£26.00
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One box of items totalling upto 25kg...£6.50 + vat
Computer systems....................................£13 + vat
All prices are correct going to press. E&OE
All goods are fully guaranteed but not supplied on approval.

Image of ideal software

Image Software has announced the release of their "Image Software small business IT solution" ('ISIT' for short).

The package consists of a RiscStation computer (16Mb, minimum 2Gb hard disc), complete with 15in monitor and Cannon Bubble Jet printer, bundled with *EBMS* (our business management package) and *Money Manager 2001* (accounts module for EBMS), both pre-installed.

The price of the package is £999 fully inclusive (of VAT and UK P&P). (Bought separately the package would cost over £1400, making a saving in the region of £400).

Image Software say that the idea behind the package is to produce a competitively priced alternative solution for the small business in a bid to secure more ground for RISC OS in the business IT market.

Also from Image Software is the latest version 0.22 of *Nutmeg*, the cacheing and site-saving software for Castle's *Oregano* Web browser and it will have been e-mailed to all registered users so if you don't have your version either get yourself registered or contact Image Software (with your name and address) to find out why you haven't got yours.

This latest version supports multi-tasking domain name resolving and has an improved persistent history list, along with numerous minor and major bug fixes.

More information can be found on the Image Software Web site or via e-mail

Image Software (UK) RISC based business management solutions. 48 Hinchliffe Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 4ED. Tel: 01202 269720 Mob: 07740 622861 Fax: 01202 685072 E-mail **sales@imagesoft.co.uk** Web **www.imagesoft.co.uk**



New deal for RISC OS

Melotech has announced that it is now selling the full range of RISC OS computers from Castle Technology (Acorn) and RiscStation.

Michael Stubbs, Melotech's Managing Director commented: "Melotech signed up to become authorised Castle Technology and RiscStation resellers several weeks ago. We've spent the time since then carrying out the appropriate preparations here at Melotech. Now RISC OS users are witnessing the entry of a new, RISC OS-dedicated dealer into the market."

The Melotech Web site has been updated and now offers fully comprehensive information on RISC OS computers, accessories and software. The site will be continually updated to reflect development from Melotech and others in the market. Melotech's MD continued: "The presence of two manufacturers of quality RISC OS machines in the marketplace, combined with the fast-changing nature of computing, means that users require comprehensive and fully up-to-date information. The vast majority of RISC OS dealers neglect to address this issue: our Web site will always be up-to-date, providing users with the very latest specifications and pricing on all of the products we sell."

A wide range of RISC OS computers, accessories and software is available now from Melotech.

Melotech has also announced the availability of two re-engineered Risc PCs, with more on the way. Both machines have been fitted with brand new StrongARM 233T processors and come with the latest version of RISC OS 4. These machines are a great way to get the latest speed at a fraction of the cost of new machines. Check out their Web site for current details. There is also a range of second-user accessories

Melotech, 1 Glossop Grove
Woodhouse Leeds West Yorkshire
LS6 2LH UK
E-mail: **sales@melotech.co.uk**
Web: **www.melotech.co.uk**





Message to Microsoft



There are a number of "instant messaging" systems in the world, these allow you to send messages directly to your friends if they happen to online right now.

The two most popular are the independent ICQ system and the Microsoft-controlled MSN/Windows Instant Messaging service. Support for ICQ has existed on RISC OS for sometime but now Phil Hardy has released his client software for the MSN instant messaging system for RISC OS. For it to work you will need an MSN Passport or Hotmail account. The current first public beta version supports:

- Basic friend list management
- Security and privacy settings
- Instant Messaging
- Hotmail messages

It currently does not support Block lists which means that you may not be able to remove a person from your friends list if that person still has you in their friends list unless you have "Ask before adding users to your conatct list" enabled.

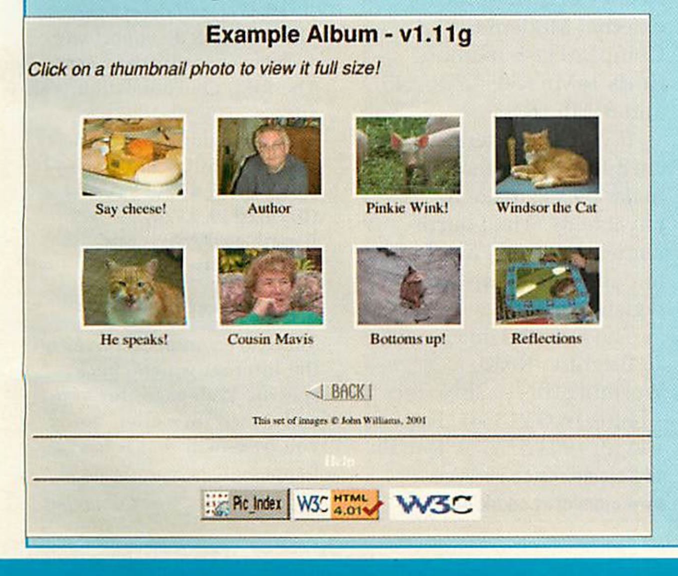
Support for this beta version is very limited. In the first instance all questions should be directed to the mailing list on Smartgroups (details on Phil's Web site). Philip is keen to receive genuine bug reports but it is important to read his Web site carefully first.

RISC OS MSN Messenger client, E-mail: **philip@phardy.karoo.co.uk** Web: **www.phardy.karoo.net/MSNMess/**

Pixel perfect pages

John Williams' *Pic_Index* is a thumbnail-indexing program for JPEG images which is under constant development. Essentially you provide the program with a HTML page template (you set choices as to what features should be included on the page) and a directory of JPEG images then the program creates a series of Web pages (suitable for CD storage or Web site use) and thumbnail images to go on them to index the entire collection.

A new development from John is a keyword/picture-finding utility which will be extremely useful for prodigious digital camera users whose libraries extend to many tens of megabytes. Though *Pic_Index* is shareware the new program will only be available to registered users.



Pic_Index is currently at version 1.11g which is a new upgrade that allows you to add logo-links to the index page if you wish. Those provided by default are a Pic_Index logo/link, and the W3C links for HTML 4.01 Transitional and for CSS validation, to which the pages now conform.

Other additions during 1.11 development include the ability to specify the order of image, comment and tools on the image pages and greater flexibility in positioning on the page. Also image dimensions are now calculated using a versatile third party utility, and this has allowed all image dimensions to be specified, not just those of the JPEGs. This additionally gives greater compatibility with RISC OS 3.1x as the software no longer uses the Acorn JPEG extension module.

It is also possible with later 1.11 versions to batch-process collections of albums using a simple text script — which makes creating bigger albums a simpler operation. Rudimentary checks are made first to help spot possible problems, and then *Pic_Index* can be left to do its work unattended.

John Williams, E-mail: **PicIndex@ukgateway.net**, Web: **www.picindex.ukgateway.net**

Total scumm

Once upon a time there was a company called LucasArts and they produced a series of extremely high quality games that were famous in their time, most notably *Monkey Island* and *Day of the Tentacle*.

These games, as is often the case with adventure games, were written using a special script language and encoded data. For LucasArts the language was SCUMM and *ScummVM* is an interpreter by Ludvig Strigeus, which enables you to play those classic LucasArts adventure games such as the aforementioned *Monkey Island, Day of the Tentacle* and *Indiana Jones 4* (yes, Indy got to Atlantis before Disney).

The RISC OS port of the ScummVM interpreter is bang up to date and lacks only a few features. The following games are playable :

- Monkey Island 1 (CD)
- Monkey Island 2
- Indiana Jones 4 and the Fate of Atlantis (and the demo)
- Day of the Tentacle (and the demo)
- Sam and Max (and the demo)

Currently only *Sam and Max* and *DOTT* have sound support. Development is progressing very quickly and bugs are being resolved swiftly. So sound support for the other games won't be far off.

You will need a machine with around 10Mb of RAM free for *Monkey Island* and up to 16Mb free for *Day of the Tentacle*.

David McEwen who has performed the port to RISC OS insists that all the credit should go to Ludvig, as he did all the real work.

You can get it from:
www.acornemus.freeserve.co.uk
David McEwen, e-mail:
david@acornemus.freeserve.co.uk

Four dimensional palmtops

CJE Micros in their guise as The Fourth Dimension have a special offer running on the Ericsson MC128 otherwise known as the Psion 5mx with the price running at £150 off.

The machine itself is a standard Ericsson-badged Psion 5mx but with a few extras for connecting by IRDA to a suitable Ericsson phone. The processor is the ARM710T running at 36.86MHz, it has 16Mb RAM and 12Mb ROM and an LCD Screen of 640x240 pixels in 16 levels of grey. It takes two AA batteries which typically give a month of life. And the keytboard has a £ sign on it. Plus you get a copy of public domain RISC OS transfer software supplied with a serial cable.

Optional extras are: Compatible power supply £15; Adaptor for Pocket Reader £12; Adaptor for external Modem £15; CompactFlash memory cards 16Mb £30; 32Mb £45; and 64Mb £60.

If you are ordering by cheque CJE ask that you make please make it payable to "The Fourth Dimension" and would like to point out 4D are not VAT registered.

The Fourth Dimension, 78 Brighton Road, Worthing, BN11 2EN; Tel: +44 (0) 1903 213361; Fax: +44 (0) 1903 523679; E-mail: **4d@cjemicros.co.uk** Web: **www.cjemicros.co.uk/4d/**

In brief

Sounds nice

NVM Digital have released two new free sampler CDs for their copyright-free music library. The audio CD version has extracts from all seventeen of their music CDs. There is also a CD-ROM version which has the same audio samples plus comprehensive track details and samples from NVMs other CD-ROMs.

NVM Digital, PO Box 1, Bentham, Lancaster LA2 7GA; Tel/Fax: 015242 52445; E-mail: **info@nvmdigital.com** Web: **www.nvmdigital.com**

Rumours

Riscstation's lack of attendance at the RISC OS 2001 Show had a lot to do with something they will have at the ARM Club Midlands Show on the 1st December 2001. Apparently.

Get webbed

RISCOS Ltd has moved to a new Web server which is now providing the following public Web sites:

http://www.riscos.com/
The main RISCOS Ltd Web site

http://acorn.riscos.com/
The contents of the old Acorn FTP site

http://productsdb.riscos.com/
The RISC OS products directory listing all software and hardware produced for Acorn computers and RISC OS

http://support.riscos.com/
The RISC OS 4 support site

http://foundation.riscos.com/
The RISC OS Foundation Web site

Email addresses will be as before. RISCOS Ltd, Tel +44 (0)29 2046 4020; Fax +44 (0)29 2049 2326; E-mail: **paul@riscos.com** Web: **www.riscos.com**

Who watches?

There are various services on the Internet which check specific Web pages for you and, when they alter, notify you by e-mail that it has happened.

Continued...

RISC OS SELECT

Make the right choice for the future with

RISC OS Select

Keep up to date with every new version of RISC OS as it appears!

In future, new updates to RISC OS will be soft-loaded over the existing RISC OS 4 ROM. Distribution will be on CD and via the Internet, making regular updates and the widespread testing of new features far more practical. Join **Select** to be a part of the new scheme and receive up to three RISC OS update CDs per year. All you will need is one or more RISC OS 4 machines on which to install new versions of RISC OS 4.

What does the Select scheme provide?

By joining **Select** you will receive the following benefits:

1. Up to three CDs per year, containing the latest version of RISC OS plus optional beta-test copies of software components in development. Every CD will also be bootable and contain a full, working disc image that allows the easy selection of different boot sequences.
2. Access to interim updates via a private Web site.
3. The ability to upgrade up to **ten** machines at a single site.

Select is a personal scheme: you only need one subscription even if you own several computers. However, RISC OS 4 is needed for each machine: **Select** cannot be used with RISC OS 3·7 or earlier.

4. **Affiliate Registered Developer** status: if you are a programmer, joining **Select** entitles you to become a Registered Developer for no extra charge, and have your products included in the Database section of **Foundation RISC User** magazine (see below).

RISC OS 4 upgrades and Select scheme prices

Subscriptions to **Select** are available on an annual basis, and may be purchased in combination with a RISC OS 4 upgrade.

RISC OS 4 upgrade plus Select subscription:	**£179**
RISC OS 4 upgrade only *(new low price!)*:	**£109**
Select subscription only: *(for existing RISC OS 4 users)*	**£105**
Select subscription only: *(for Foundation members)*	**£99**
Select group subscription: *(for sites with more than ten machines)*	**£300**

All prices above include VAT.

Please see our Web site for further pricing details, overseas prices etc.

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Foundation RISC User is a truly innovative publication from RISCOS Ltd that supports the heart of the RISC OS market. The magazine articles combine useful information with software resources that can be launched with a simple click on a link. Every issue is packed with a wide range of substantial and authoritative features from respected writers, along with a comprehensive and fully integrated database of current RISC OS products, developers and user groups. Altogether, it's arguably the most innovative and high quality CD magazine on any platform.

Testimonials from readers of Foundation RISC User

- "The interface is very friendly and better than my perception of what a CD-based magazine would be like!"—*Andrew Weston*
- "The whole CD is a joy, and something our platform can be proud of."—*Geoff Steeper*
- "The Foundation CD has contradicted my opinion that I wouldn't be able to read a CD magazine happily. It's very nicely laid out."—*Fred Bambrough*
- "Congratulations on Foundation RISC User… it works smoothly, looks good and has masses of useful and interesting content."—*Gavin Wraith*
- "Keep up the excellent work! (And what I REALLY appreciate is someone who can write, spell, talk sense, and knows his its-es and it's-es!)"—*Jeremy Roberts*
- "It's a really excellent job."—*David Pilling*

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The Classic Z

Following hard on the heels of the ScummVM interpreter there is yet another format of adventure game, though this one is a little interactive: Z-code is the crossplatform virtual machine created by Infocom for their 1980s adventure games. It is now used by many contemporary interactive fiction authors, thanks to the Inform compiler.

Using this system it is possible to create your own adventure games and even enter competitions to see how yours compare to others. As there is cross-platform standardisation you can play the games created by hundreds of other people across the world — and they can play yours.

A new version of Zip 2000, Kevin Bracey's RISC OS Z-code interpreter, is now available. With the following features included (and if you don't know what they all are it probably doesn't matter):

- Full support for Versions 1 to 8 games
- Full conformance to Graham Nelson's "Z-Machine Standards Document", Revision 1.0
- Complete Blorb version 1.1 support
- Graphics support
- Sound support
- Colour support
- Timed-input support
- Mouse support
- Menu support
- Full function key/cursor key/keypad support
- Full foreign language support, including runes and Unicode
- Easily adjustable screen size
- Full use of anti-aliased outline fonts
- Line editing and command recall
- Standard Quetzal-format save files
- Full alpha-compositing, dithering and gamma correction for PNG pictures
- Multiple UNDO
- High speed — the fastest Z-code interpreter for RISC OS
- The most standards-compliant Z-code interpreter on any platform
- The best-looking Z-code interpreter on any platform

One thinks that perhaps Kevin is a little bit biased on that last point — but let's let him have it. Anyway the major new features in version 1.40 are:

- Updated to full Blorb 1.1 support, including MODs, SONGs and JPEGs
- Recompiled to be 32-bit compatible (except for the included DataVox and QTM modules)
- Screen size can be adjusted
- Supports the proposed Blorb extension for Infocom graphics

Plus Kevin syas there have been many other improvements and bug fixes, too numerous to mention. This release has been prompted by the Interactive Fiction Competition 2001, which is underway right now. For more details, see:

The Zip 2000 home page:
www.bracey-griffith.freeserve.co.uk/Zip2000/
The Interactive Fiction Archive:
www.ifarchive.org
The Inform home page:
www.gnelson.demon.co.uk/inform.html
The Interactive Fiction Competiton 2001:
http://ifcomp.org/

Putting the Z in IDE

ZIDEFS is a fully fledged replacement filing system for the 'old' Ian Copestake Software 16-bit IDE interface from about 1991. It was written (and recently updated) by John Kortink and it is completely free.

If you have one of these cards it is probably gathering dust with ZIDEFS you have a no-frills, but otherwise completely up-to-date, filing system for this card, so you can put it to good use once more.

Compared to the last version of ZIDEFS, 0.90 (from 1994, pre-Risc PC) the following developments have been made:

- Compatible with all machines from an Archimedes with RISC OS 3.1 up to the latest Risc PC running RISC OS 4.
- Fully supports drives up to 256Gb.
- Support for LBA (Logical Block Addressing).
- Several improvements to the Filer.

Compared to the original IDEFS supplied with the IDE interface, ZIDEFS has offered and ZIDEFS 1.00 still offers :

- Support for up to four partitions
- Improved harddisc compatibility
- Support for the 'Free' module
- Optimal transfer speeds

John Kortink, e-mail: **kortink@inter.nl.net**
Web: **www.inter.nl.net/users/J.Kortink/software.htm**

In brief

Rather than subscribe to yet another Internet service you can now do it from the comfort of your own home.

NetWatch is a program which automatically checks for updated pages and files on the Web. The program allows URLs to be added, by typing them or dragging a URL-file. For every URL some choices have to be made such as how often to check for a change.

From that point on *NetWatch* will check your URLs and warn you when the specified object has been changed. The latest features to be added in version 1.55 are:

- For every URL a checksum is calculated instead of keeping the whole page.
- All writable icons (in NetWatch) support pasting from the clipboard — handy to copy a URL instead of retyping it.

Maarten Bezemer, e-mail **m.m.bezemer@student.utwente.nl**
Web **http://home.student.utwente.nl/m.m.bezemer/netwatchuk.html**

Real good deals

As a special Christmas bonus Real Ingenuity is almost giving away a very special Christmas gift to all RISC OS users. The RealMerryXmas pack features:

- RealSurf featuring your own .co.uk domain name plus e-mail (usually £48).



- R-Comp Internet Suite with *MessengerPro*, *WebsterXL* and *DialUp* (usually £48).
- 56k External Modem (usually £48).
- Enabling of PHP and Perl on Web space (usually £18).
- *HTMLPro* HTML

Continued...

Obituary: Mike Wilson (1923–2001)

On Saturday 3rd November Mike Wilson died as the result of a fire that gutted his ground floor flat at St Peter's Crescent, Morley. All of us that knew him, even slightly, are deeply shocked and still coming to terms with what a loss this will be. Mike was 78 years young (no one who laughed like he did could be truly old) and a dedicated technophile.

His foundation course was being born into a family well know in the West Yorkshire machine tool industry. He continued his "education" as a communications specialist when he was called up to serve in the second world war. Training took place in England before he was sent by troop ship to India.

The journey, in convoy, was slow and potentially boring so, typical Mike, he persuaded a chum that had trained with him to spend the weeks on the ship learning and relearning the contents of their training notes. Arriving in India they had to sit an exam to ensure that they had not forgotten their training.

The officer in charge saw their results and immediately set them on as trainers. His army career never looked back and he came home at the end of the war as Major Wilson.

One of Mike's passions was motor sport. On his return to civvy street he managed to combine this with earning a living at C. H. Wood's in Bradford where he made many of the "Castrol" motor sport films that were so popular in the 50's and 60's. The job involved travelling all over Europe to record events such as the Isle of Man TT Races, the Le Man's 24 hour Race and all the F1 races.

When the technology changed from cine-film to video, Mike took to it like a duck to water and embarked on a relationship with computers that he maintained until the end. He was an expert film editor who, well after most people have retired, still edited training films for his final employers, Auto-Glass.

Another of his interests was railways. Last year I had a day out with him at the National Railway Museum at York. What a day it was — Mike's deep technical understanding and inexhaustible fund of anecdotes made it an occasion that I will never forget.

Mike was the perfect gentleman, 99.9 per cent of the time, kind, patient and truly chivalrous. On the odd 0.1 per cent of occasions when someone had made a real effort to exasperate him, the dour Yorkshire wit became evident.

It didn't last long though as he invariably ended up reducing everyone present including himself and the offending party to uncontrollable laughter. That laugh again — maybe that is what we should remember — he would approve of that.

I can't sum it up with any greater eloquence than group member Dave Barrow who wrote "He was a great chap for whom I had the deepest respect and fondness."

Chris Quinn

The scheme of things

Clare Micro Supplies have announced that their policy of continual development of the *Schema 2* spreadsheet and the *SchemEx* product means that you can now transfer between *Schema 2* and *Excel XP* as well as *Excel 2000*. Other new enhancements include cell colours transferring correctly, user variables retained on transfer, cell border styles transferred and improved cross-sheet referencing.

This is all done via the use of HTML as an intermediary or interchange format. David Jackson of Clares is currently working through a wish list drawn up in response to earlier versions of both products. A full review of *SchemEx* will appear in a future edition of *Acorn User*.

SchemEx costs £25 inc VAT plus p&p or only £15 extra if you buy it with *Schema 2* for £80.

Schema 2 is also actively under development which is good news for the user community. A full list of

Continued...

In brief

conversion system for *OvationPro* (usually £30).

You can get all of this, which has a total value of £192, for just £132 including VAT and delivery. And just to top it all off they will even gift wrap it for you! Offer ends January 31st 2002.

Real Ingenuity Limited, Web: www.realingenuity.com Tel: 08000 191 242

Games in Paradise

Paradise (see review of their Paintpal graphics tablet elsewhere in this issue) have announced a special deal on the two games in their



porfolio: *Overload* and *Inferno.* These normally retail at £12.99 and £9.99 respectively but are now available at only £5 each or £8 for the pair. Are they doing a bargain or what?

Overload is a fast scrolling arcade-type game and Inferno is a fast, 25 level shoot em' up of the PacMan



Continued...

Contacting AU

news@acornuser.com

The scheme of things (cont)

recent enhancements includes:

- Up to 512 styles/effects per sheet
- Up 512 *drawfiles*/graphs per sheet
- Long filename support for RISC OS 4
- Automatically load a user supplied macro when Schema loads
- Use either > < or : as the block separators
- Set a sheet to recalcualte automatically on loading
- Pasting operations into a block now does a replicate where appropriate
- Visible indication of cell overflow if desired
- Formulae can be exported as CSV file
- Access to save dialogue via an icon ribbon button
- Extended use of cursor keys when entering data
- Extra configuration options for data entry

If you want to find out more about it contact: Clares Micro Supplies Ltd, 75a Webbs Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 9DS; Tel: 01606 833999;
E-mail **sales@claresmicro.com**
Web: **www.claresmicro.com**

In brief

variety for those of you old enough to remember *PacMan*.

Playable demos are available to download on their Web site but at £8 for both games you would really need to be a tightwad not to send the cheque payable to Paradise Group.

Paradise, 38 Marlborough Drive, Sydenham, Leamington Spa, Warks CV31 1GD; Tel: 01926 315907;
Web: www.paradise-uk.net
E-mail: info@paradise-uk.net

Getting in the frame

Now that Olympus have discontinued their serial port cameras and replaced them with a new series of USB port cameras, Photodesk have reviewed their camera strategy.

They now offer a wider range of cameras whose price includes either a SmartMedia or CompactFlash reader complete with RISC OS compatible software. Each bundle comes with *SmartFS* from Surftec as well as our *PhotoLink*-like front-end, *PhotoShow*.

Like *PhotoLink*, *PhotoShow* allows management of the camera contents in a clipboard of thumbnails, as well as detailed information about each photograph extracted from the EXIF format. This information not only shows time and date but also picture resolution, exposure information and so on.



Their new range of cameras and prices include:

Olympus C1 1.3Mpixel	£299.00
Olympus C2 2.1Mpixel	£POA
Olympus C1Z 1.3Mpixel optical zoom	£399.00
Olympus C200Z 2.1Mpixel optical zoom	£469.50
Olympus C2040Z 2.1Mpixel	£POA
Olympus C700UZ 2.1Mpixel 10x optical zoom	£750.00
Olympus C3040Z 3 Mpixel optical zoom with serial and USB	£790.00
Olympus C4040Z	£POA
Olympus C40Z 4 Mpixel optical zoom compact	£850.00
Canon Powershot A10 1.3Mpixel optical zoom	£440.00
Canon Powershot A20 2.1Mpixel optical zoom	£495.00
Canon Ixus300 2.1Mpixel optical zoom	£690.00
Canon Ixus V 2.1Mpixel optical zoom video	£599.00
Canon Pro90 3.3 Mpixel 10x optical zoom	£900.00
Canon G2 4 Mpixel 3x optical zoom	£850.00
Casio QV2900 2.1MPixel Bestshot technology 8xZoom (32x possible)	£540.00
Casio QV3500 3.1MPixel Bestshot technology 3xZoom	£580.00
Casio QV3500+ 3.1MPixel Bestshot technology IBM Microdrive included, 3xZoom	£775.00
Casio QV4000 4 Mpixel optical zoom Microdrive compatible	£775.00

These prices also include VAT. With USB expansion cards soon to be introduced the prices of these cameras, bundled with USB hardware, will not be significantly different.

Olympus, being primarily an optical company, make cameras with very good optics but are a little light on expensive accessories such as mains adaptors and rechargeables. Canon although slightly more expensive have stacks of accessories included. Casio are good value and have Canon lenses (and can take Canon accessories) being an electronics company they are packed with electronic goodies such as the superb best shot technology. Style-wise they are a bit clunky but who cares?

Photodesk do have some more Olympus C960 cameras with serial port. These are ex-demo, refurburbished or box damaged but are going at the superb price of £230. They have 1.3 Mpixel and a 3x optical + 2x digital zoom. These cameras have PhotoLink bundled and are fully RISCOS compatible.

Photodesk Ltd. 1 The Courtyard, Southwell Business Park, Portland, Dorset, DT5 2NQ Web: **www.photodesk.ltd.uk**
Tel: +44(0) 1305 822753 Fax: +44(0) 1305 860483 E-mail: **chris@photodesk.ltd.uk**

Switching Solutions from.....





Use your RiscPC or PC keyboard or our NEW click multimedia keyboard inc RISC OS drivers only £34.95

3-button Genius mouse (as used in STD standard mouse) FREE with switch or £10 inc as A7000 spare





Keyboard controlled switch allows the use of a single monitor, keyboard and mouse with two machines.

Only £99.95 inc
Pack with PS2MouseMini only £113.90
Manual and other switches available



Your RISCPC Here!

We are able to supply a range of custom high specification PC base units. eg:

Duron 750 / 128MB / 20GB / DVD / modem / speakers / keyboard / mouse £499 inc

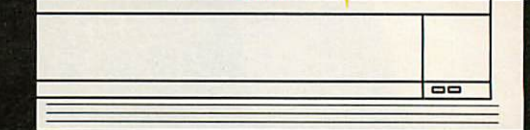
Duron 900 / 256MB / 40GB / DVD / Geforce2MX graphics / periphs as above £649 inc

Athlon 1200 / 256MB / 40GB / DVD / CD-rewriter / Gf2MX / periphs as above £799 inc

Windows ME / MS Works bundle, installed, add £100 inc

Keyboard controlled switch pack inc PS2MouseMini only £100 inc when purchased with PC.

PS2MouseMini allows the use of PC-style PS/2 mice with all RISC OS machines which do not already have a PS/2 port (ie all but A7000/RiscStation) Use PC mice (or switches) Only £18.95



A7000, RiscStation and Omega machines may also be switched and do not require a PS2MouseMini interface



PARAFS is a parallel port networking system for machines fitted with a bi-directional parallel port (A30x0 / A4000 / A5000 / A4 / A7000 / RiscStation / Mico / Omega / RiscPC)

It is implemented as a filing system and so provides transparent file sharing across machines without the need for cumbersome and slow transfer programs. Files and directories which are stored on the remote machine appear as if they are local

ParaFS typically achieves access speeds of well above 100K/sec, making it an ideal solution for most file-sharing applications.

£29.95 inc easy-to-find red transfer cable. £22.95 software only.

Standard mouse

A quality, branded 3-button mouse for machines fitted with a standard Acorn (9 pin connector) mouse port. Adapted for Acorn machines using our PS2MouseMini technology. Only £19.95



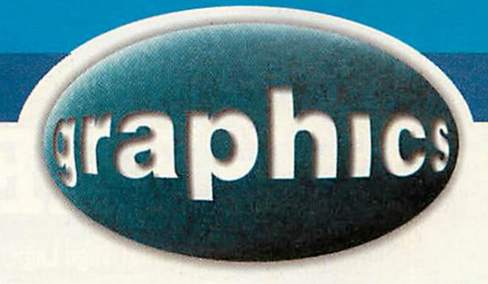
Remember - all calls to our 0845 number are charged at local rate.....



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Artful dodging

It's been a little while since we had a picture of the month in *Acorn User* so we thought we would make up for it this time with three of them.

Two of them have been created by June Pugh who took a sudden interest in "false" colours and the other by Andrew Weston who has been known to grace these pages with his written word from time to time.

We have left it to each of the artists to describe how their images were created. First Andrew:

"Here's an image created from TopModel with the sky added via Composition and the planet image imported as a TopModel object. All the landscape features have been created with TopModel itself."



And this is what June has to say:

"The landscape image was inspired by scenes of the dawn of the Year 2000 around the world. It took me about two hours to create in Artworks. There are four layers with outlines in the first layer and then each layer of the image became a new layer in the file. I decided to use these colours after seeing the effect on TV, perhaps my TV needs adjusting.

"The whole effect was very surprising and I just had to get it down. Since then I have been doing other landscapes and simply inverting the colours for dramatic and artistic effect. The second image is an example of that showing Standley Chasm in Central Australia and you can see my interest in landscape colour."



Contacting AU

graphics@acornuser.com

All products are compatible with StrongARM and RISC OS 4
Some products are enhanced for RISC OS 4
All prices include VAT and UK carriage (where applicable)

HERE IS THE NEWS...

22 Robert Moffat, High Legh, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6PS • Tel 01925 755043 • Fax 01925 757377 • http://www.rcomp.co.uk/

RComp

rcomp@rcomp.co.uk

Please note - R-Comp prices now include VAT

Web Authoring

HTMLEdit Studio (Whole Suite) £110
Next-generation Web authoring tools for RISC OS
HTMLEdit Studio is the solution to all your Web authoring needs, whether large or small. Available either as a complete suite or piece by piece as a series of components:

HTMLEdit 4+ £53
Award-winning HTML editor with many powerful features
WATCH OUT FOR HTMLEDIT 5 SOON!

WebsterXL £30
Fully-featured Web browser, tuned to work with HTMLEdit
Enhanced Web Designer's Toolkit £30
Visual editing of frames, tables, animation, image maps etc.
WebSpell (HTML-aware spelling checker) **£15**

Also Available:
SiteMaster 2+ £35
Site management tools for checking, moving, publishing and uploading whole or partial web sites.

Internet Utilities

R-Comp Internet Suite £69
First class software to get you online!
Consists of DialUp, Messenger Pro 2 & WebsterXL (described below). Available with a 56k Modem and Account for £115.

Messenger Pro 2 . . . . £37
Comprehensive email and news reader software
- Easy to set up and use, yet extremely powerful
- Flexible view options, such as a powerful threading mode
- Offline and Network (£45) versions available.

WebsterXL £30
Browser with support for advanced Web technologies
- Supports frames, tables, JavaScript and 128-bit SSL etc.
- Flexible printing, saving, exporting, cut/paste facilities

DialUp £23
Internet connection utility; supports multiple ISP accounts
NB. £18 to Messenger Pro owners, or £12 if you own WXL

Also Available:
SiteSeer £25
Web site grabbing utility for offline viewing

Utilities

EasyClip 2 . . . . £25
Graphical resource management system
Store and manage your clip-art and photograph collections with great ease

Messenger Pro 2 New Version!

The leading RISC OS Email system is now easier to use, yet packs in many new features including message deferring, improved threading, "Hotlisting" of links for when you go online and much more. Includes a new 48 page printed manual.
Contact us for upgrade prices and more information . . **£37**
Server version for home networks due soon!

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Network Printing/Shared Internet

Print-server Box inc Software £155
2(3)-port 10Mbit print server, supplied with *Network Printers* software: access up to three traditional printers via a network
Others Available - ring for details.

Network Printers £40
(Software only; includes site licence)
Print to network-enabled printers and print server boxes

Music

Anthem £70
The RISC OS MIDI Sequencer, with extensive features. Ring for details - we can advise in most sound/music matters. Some of the products we stock include:

Parallel Port MIDI Interface £95
ESP MIDI Synthesiser Plus £45
Listen to MIDI music without expensive hardware!

Games

Abuse . . . . £25·00
The Chaos Engine . . . . £20·00
Descent 1 & 2 Double Pack . . . . . £35·00
Descent 2 for existing owners £15.00
Doom+ Trilogy . . . . £32·50
Final Doom . . . . £15·00
Heretic and Hexen . . . . £30·00
Heroes of Might and Magic II . . . . £35·00
The Price of Loyalty (for HoMM2) . . . . £22·00
Quake . . . . £23·00
Spheres of Chaos version 2 . . . . . £15·00
Syndicate+ . . . . £29·00
TBA Classics (six-game collection) . . . £22·00
Krisalis Gold CD £26.00
RISC User in a Nutshell CD . . . . . . £32·00

Artex

Ankh . . . . £10·00
Exodus . . . . £20·00

Watch this Space!



Broadband for Christmas

The cost of a BT ADSL Broadband connection is still hard to justify for most home users, but competition for your custom is beginning to bring prices down. For the months before Christmas 2001, BT has reduced the installation fee from £150 to £75 (inc VAT). This reduction has been passed on by most ADSL-reselling ISPs, but it still leaves a hefty monthly rental of £40-£50 inc VAT.

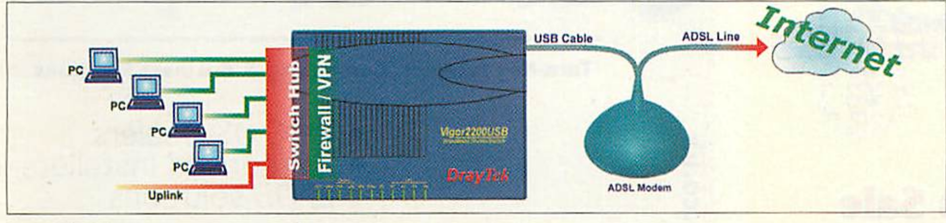
RISC OS owners may also have been dissuaded from indulging themselves by the technical requirements of the basic single-user ADSL service from BT, which needs a USB interface for their supplied Alcatel "Speedtouch" ADSL "modem". Although USB will soon be coming to RISC OS, there is an immediate option that existing users might wish to consider.

The Vigor2200USB is a USB router, switching Ethernet hub and firewall all-in-one, and costs £179+VAT. How does that help a non-USB RISC OS owner? The clever part of it is that the Vigor box takes the place of a USB-equipped PC, and interfaces the Alcatel ADSL "Frog" USB modem to an Ethernet network hub with firewalling, packet filtering, DNS proxy and cache. Just plug in a RISC OS machine that has an 10Base-T Ethernet card and off you go.

You might suspect that there's a Linux box inside the Draytek Vigor2200USB, which is manufactured in Taiwan, but you'd be wrong. You'll be pleased to hear that it's ARM-powered, running a proprietary and very stable operating system called DrayOS.

The agreement with your ISP is not affected because you are still using the ADSL modem they supply, but plugged into the Vigor2200USB instead of a PC. There's already a waiting list for these boxes, so get your order in as soon as you can.

DrayTek Vigor 2200USB Router from SEG Communications
www.seg.co.uk/draytek/products/vigor2200usb.html



How to hook it up

Closing the door ... again

Further newsgroup discussion on securing SMTP e-mail deliveries has shed more light on this subject. I recently gave details for configuring Stewart Brodie's *FreeSMTP* to only accept mail from Demon Internet's SMTP e-mail server by using the fully-qualified domain name but in practice this probably won't work.

Stewart has explained that you should use the CIDR numeric IP address notation. CIDR is an acronym for Classless Inter-Domain Routing, and is the newer 32-bit IP address naming notation that has taken over from the old Class A, B and C convention.

What used to be called a Class A address range, such as 194.X.X.X has become CIDR 194/8. This notation means that the network number part of the address is 8 bits long, and the other 24 bits will identify individual machines on that network.

Similarly an old Class B address range like 194.217.X.X is now CIDR 194.217/16 with 16 bits for machine identity. In their FAQ Demon give the range of addresses for their mail server as 194.217.242.0 to 255, which translates into the CIDR notation 194.217.242/24

FreeSMTP slightly adapts this notation for the range of acceptable addresses from which to allow connection, and so for the Demon Internet SMTP server the config file should contain the line: acceptfrom 194.217.242.0/24

In brief

Smooth Advice

For a sobering treatise on how to conduct yourself as an information seeker by e-mail, newsgroup or Web chat board, read the preface of the FAQ and Troubleshooting guide for the freeware SmoothWall Linux Router and Firewall.

In an earnest but hectoring style, Eric Raymond exhorts you to read the Manual, the FAQ, search the Web and ask a friend first. Only then may you dare to pose still-unanswered questions to a public forum, but phrased in a way that shows you have already exhausted the self-help solutions.

SmoothWall FAQ
www.smoothwall.org/downloads/pdf/docs/0.9.9/doc.faq.pdf

Acorn News

Ian Hawkins' AcornSearch site now lets you read online all the Acorn newsgroups as Web pages, and its news server at **www.acornsearch.com** also carries Java and Psion newsgroups. The compact front page has quick links to most Acorn and RISC OS resources, including a list of relevant items for online auction on Ebay and Yahoo Auctions. You'll find RISC OS and computing technology news, file archives, reference material and anything and everything to do with Acorn and RISC OS.

AcornSearch
www.acornsearch.com

Mystery meat nav

This is one of Vincent Flanders' elements of bad Web design highlighted on his "Web Pages That Suck" site. His premise is that by recognising what is bad, you can learn good design principles.

The site features examples of past and present pages with design howlers, and "The Daily Sucker" picks up new ways to do something bad, but Flanders also offers tutorials on good Web design. He calls "Mystery Meat Navigation" those Javascript buttons that only reveal their destination when you roll over them with the mouse.

Web Pages That *Suck*
www.webpagesthatsuck.com

Contacting me
David Dade:
comms@acornuser.com

Networking in the home

A personal experience by Mike Gillard

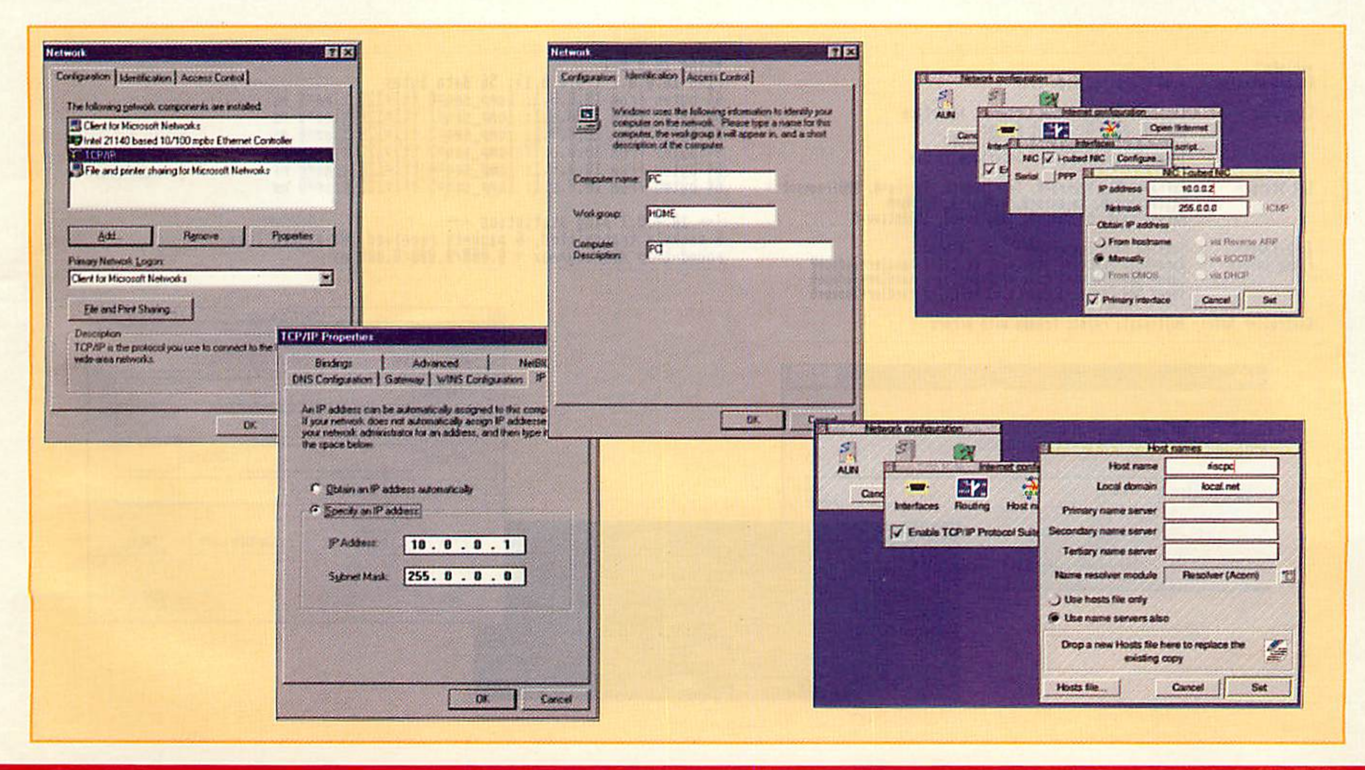
Many of us Acorn users have, for whatever reason or purpose, added a PC running Microsoft's Windows operating system to our home computing setup. Some might well have opted for MacOS or Linux, say, as alternative systems but on the whole Windows appears to be the more popular choice.

I have such an arrangement at home where I have a PC and a Risc PC, and had a need to network the two so that I could transfer files from one to the other. This sort of thing was not new to me, over the years I have helped many schools link their computers together both on the physical cabling front and also in setting up the appropriate software to get different systems to communicate with each other.

This has allowed both staff and pupils to share information (files and applications) and resources (such as access to printers, a CD drive, or a link to the Internet). Networking computers in schools has become commonplace and offers many benefits to the users over multiple stand-alone workstations: files, directories, and applications can all be administered centrally and accessed from anywhere, and users can communicate with each other.

I.T. is now I.C.T. since the ability to 'communicate' and share ideas and information is integral. Quite often it is possible to transfer files from one computer to another using storage media such as floppy discs, zip discs, writable CDs, and removable hard disk drives, for example — all of which require the user to physically transfer them to the other computer but, although increasing in storage space, each of these solutions has a fixed and limited capacity. A direct cable linking one computer to another (or more) allows for easy data transfer without the limitations of file-size inherent in other methods, and usually speeds up the process.

When linking different types of computer you must find a common ground. Most computers can read DOS-formatted floppy discs so this means you could transfer small files between PCs, Macs, and Acorns via floppies. These disparate systems can also communicate over an Ethernet cable connection. In a school or office environment where there might be a large number of computers, one might be designated as a dedicated



server to store information centrally and share resources.

A crucial aspect of the server is that it runs software to allow the other systems to talk to it, so that files and information can be passed back and forth. When setting out to link my home PC and my Risc PC so that I could transfer files between them, I needed to satisfy a number of criteria. I needed to ensure each computer had an Ethernet network interface card (NIC), to connect the two computers using an appropriate cable, and then to run software which would allow the two different systems to communicate properly.

If you don't have a NIC you can get one for a PC on the High Street from about £15 and could probably pick up one for a Risc PC second hand for about £50. In my Risc PC all I needed to do was to fit the NIC into its dedicated expansion slot (since it has its 'drivers' built in) but the PC's NIC needed to have the software drivers installed separately.

Windows auto-detected the addition of the new hardware and, after asking me to insert the accompanying floppy diskette, recognised the network card I had fitted. The next part required was the cable. The most common type of network cabling is category five, unshielded twisted-pair (CAT5 UTP). Where three or more computers are being networked, a central hub is used into which each workstation is patched with its own dedicated cable.

This is rather like a bicycle wheel where each spoke connects to the centre. Because I was linking just two computers I needed a specific variation on this type of cable where the internal wiring differs slightly, known as a 'cross-over' cable. Physically, my two machines were connected, now onto the setting up of the software.

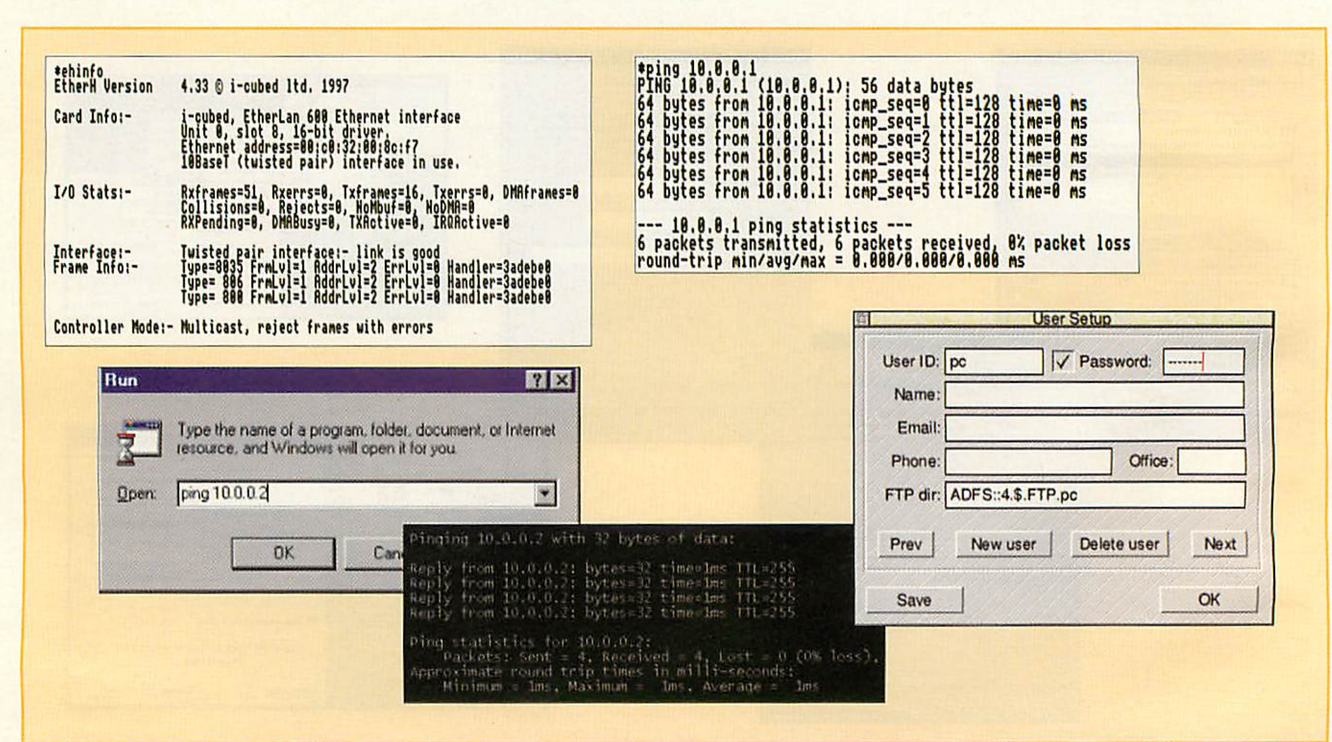
Both Windows and RISC OS (and other systems) support a common protocol for communication, known as TCP/IP. All computers that access the Internet use this underlying set of instructions for communication. Although both computers are talking the language of TCP/IP they will not automatically talk to each other (just like two people with walkie-talkies, they both need to be on the same frequency channel before they can start communicating).

Each machine needed to be set up in a similar way by having its own unique identity (but be communicating on the same frequency). On my PC, a click of the right-hand mouse button on the Network Neighborhood desktop icon lead me to the configuration options for the network card. I set the properties for TCP/IP so that the IP address was 10.0.0.1 (in conjunction with a Subnet mask of 255.0.0.0), and I identified my PC as 'PC' to keep things simple.

Similarly, in the network options inside the configuration of my Risc PC, I set the IP address to 10.0.0.2 (with the same subnet mask. The various combinations of IP addresses and subnet masks allows for very large networks of computers to be set up. Where only two machines are being linked you need only ensure that the IP addresses are different but that the subnet mask is the same.

This is a bit of an over-simplification and there are other reasons why I chose these specific settings. Anyone wanting to know about networking in greater depth can easily read more on the subject.

With the network cards fitted and



the TCP/IP configurarations set I tested communication on a fundamental level. Just like echo-sounding sonar where submarines 'ping' the ocean floor or other sea vessels, computers can 'ping' each other with a small packet of data to ensure they recognise each other's presence. With the TCP/IP protocol enabled the 'ping' command becomes available and can be used on both Windows and RISC OS.

This is a good way to make sure everything is set up properly initially. I pinged from each machine to the other and found them not responding. After some head-scratching I remembered that the i-cubed NIC I had in my Risc PC was a combi card (it has both the RJ45 socket used for CAT5 UTP/10BaseT cable and the round BNC/10Base2 connector) — it defaults to the BNC/10BaseT connection. A quick reset of my Risc PC forced the NIC to auto-detect the cable that was actually connected and everything was working fine.

Fundamentally, my two computers were talking — they had a direct connection and were sending and receiving signals on the same frequency, but they weren't yet communicating effectively. I wanted to be able to transfer files from one machine to the other (in either direction) so I chose to use FTP software.

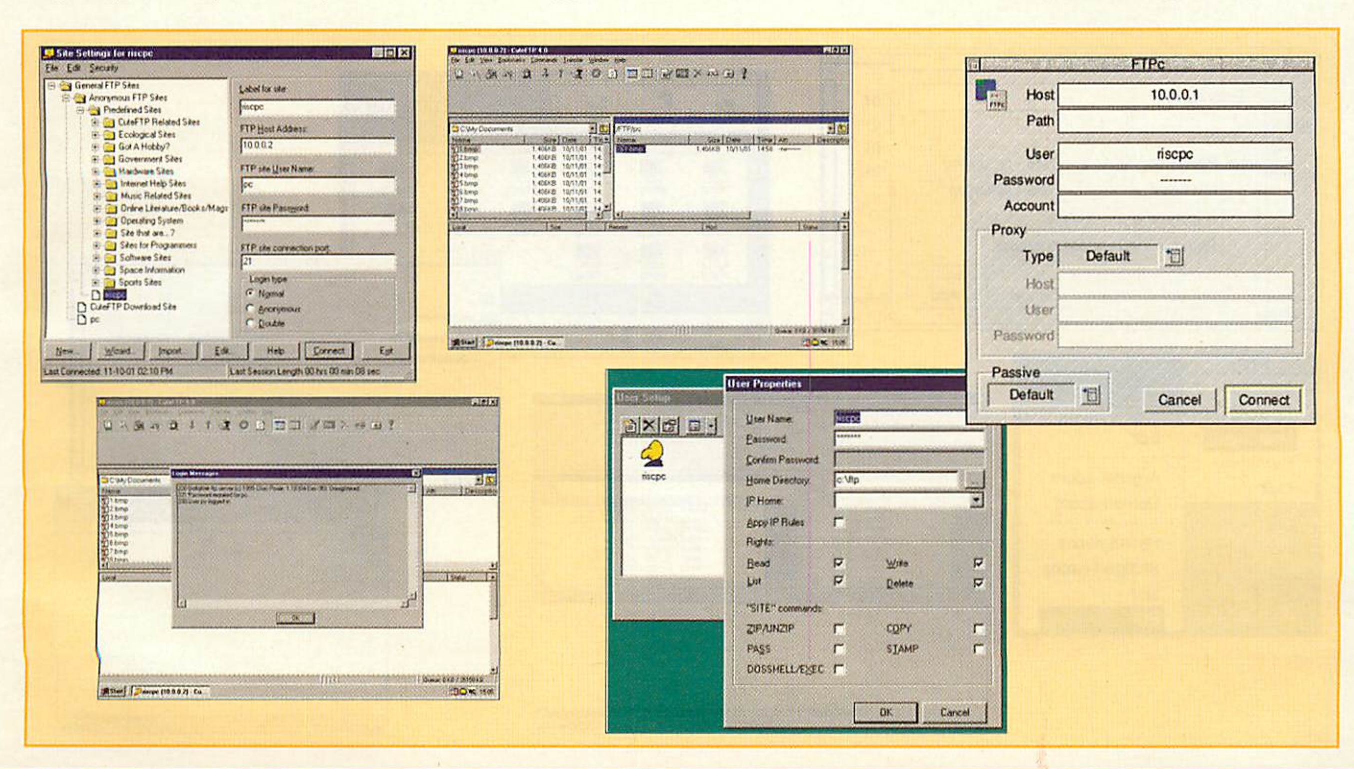
One method of moving files on the Internet is using the File Transfer Protocol. Since all computers that can access the Internet can use FTP, this allows for broad compatability between different platforms. It might not be the fastest method of communication between Windows and RISC OS, but I find it to be simple, effective, and reliable. FTP requires a server and client relationship so I had to find relevant software to allow my computers to perform these roles.

I started by searching on TuCows for Windows software and AcornSearch for RISC OS. My searching unearthed *CuteFTP* and *FTPc* (FTP clients) for Windows and RISC OS respectively, and ArGoSoft's *FTP Server* and *DeltaNet* (FTP servers). This allowed me to have the Risc PC serving (sharing) a directory using *DeltaNet* and being accessed on the PC using *CuteFTP* and also to have a folder being served/shared from the PC using ArGoSoft's *FTP server* application to be accessed on the Risc PC using *FTPc*. There is always a little configuration required when setting up such software but it was simple and straightforward and things were working very soon.

DeltaNet (RISC OS FTP server): Inside the application is an obey file which establishes several system variables. This needed to be edited to prevent the initial 'Please edit the !Configure file before running DeltaNet' message from popping up each time I tried to run the program and to disable the features of the application which weren't required (DeltaNet can run as an HTTP proxy too, if you want to share Web pages). Next, having run the application, I needed to configure a user so that the PC had permission to connect to the FTP server and to specify which folder on my Risc PC it would have access to.

CuteFTP (Windows FTP client): on the corresponding client side of this relationship, I simply needed to connect to my Risc PC (using its IP address) and enter the details of the user I had just created in *DeltaNet*. This then gave me access from my PC to a shared folder on my Risc PC.

ArGoSoft's FTP Server (Windows FTP server): the configuration for



this was similarly straightforward in that all that was required was the creation of a user who was allowed to access the PC via FTP and to specify which folder to share to that user.

FTPc (RISC OS FTP client): having entered the PCs IP address and my user's details I connected to the PC's shared folder. Once a connection had been established I could easily store that connection into the readily accessible menu listing for immediate access in the future.

With the underlying communication between the two computers having been established when the TCP/IP protol was activated and working, running any other software on top of that becomes a very simple procedure. It wasn't really necessary for me to run both server AND client on both machines. I could have managed quite happily running the *ArGoSoft FTP server* on my PC and *FTPc* on my Risc PC, for example, and still achieved the same effect but I wanted to see if each machine would operate in each FTP role of both server and client.

There are several ways of enhancing the communication between my Windows PC and my Risc PC. The sharing and transferring of files is one aspect. Other software applications exist which allow one computer with access to the Internet (via a modem, for example) to share that access through the network card to another computer (PC/Mac/or Acorn) utilising just the one telephone line. Email or Web access could be filtered through one computer so that unwanted material is not passed on to the computer in your child's bedroom.

You might have two computers but only one printer, so the ability to share access to the printer without having to disconnect and reconnect cables physically would be a benefit. The A5000 you have with a 200MBytes hard disk could utilise a little of the spare storage space on the vast 20GBytes disk in your new PC.

Maybe you have a CD-Writer on one machine and want to transfer files over so that they can be backed up/burnt to CD for safe-keeping. Or how about a co-operative game of DOOM or Quake between two computers. I chose to use FTP because it is quick and easy to set up, uses 'industry-standard' methods of communication (which means that if I am connected to the Internet and want to allow someone anywhere in the world access to a specific folder on my computer I can do so by simple running the FTP server software and, no matter what computer platform they might be using, they can get at the files I give them access to), and also it didn't cost me anything.

But those wanting a more invisible and seamless cross-platform networking solution might also like to investigate Warm Silence Software's commercial offering *LanMan98* which supports Windows' long filename convention and RISC OS' filetyping.

Useful links

Windows

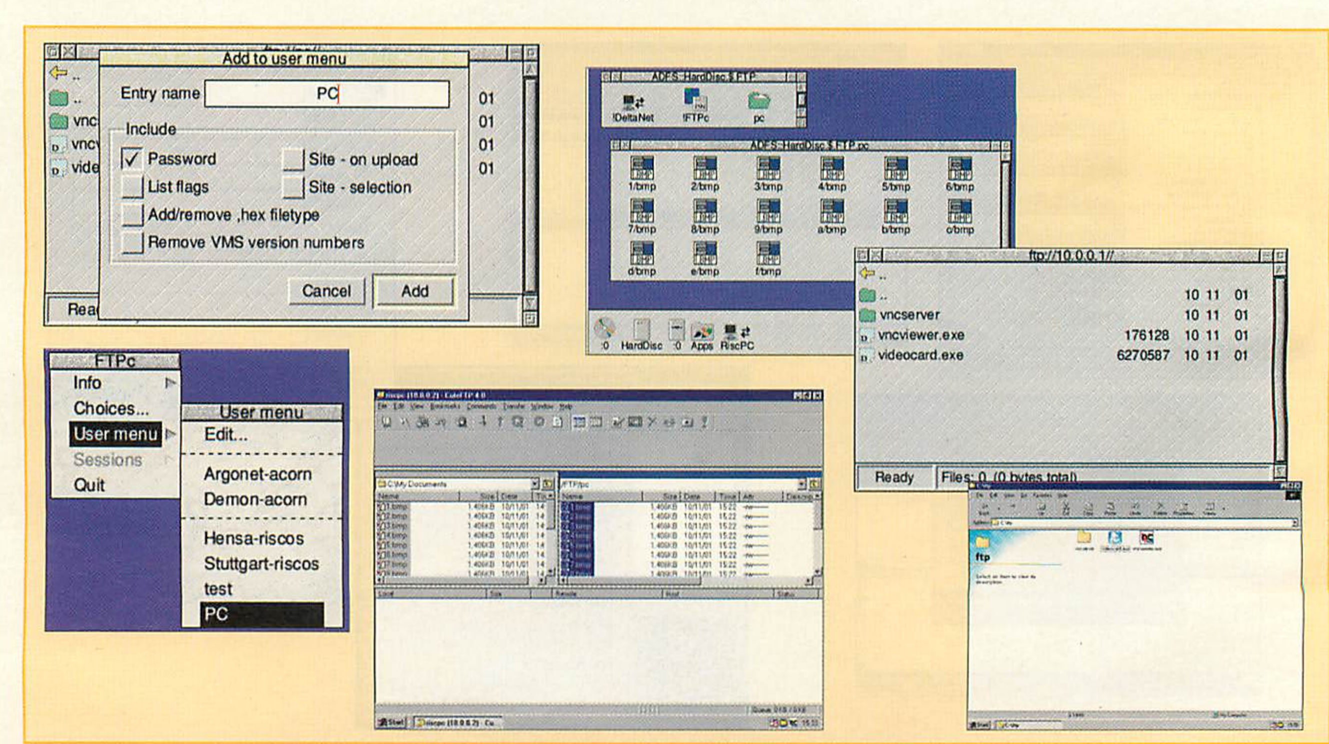
ArGoSoft FTP Server (shareware)
www.argosoft.com/applications/ftpserver/

CuteFTP Client (free trial)
www.cuteftp.com

RISC OS

DeltaNet Server (shareware)
www.smilingvalley.co.uk/deltanet.zip

FTPc Client (freeware)
www.ftpc.iconbar.com



Becoming

Mike Tomkinson explores the new graphics tablet from Paradise

Oh yes! At last a new bit of hardware for the platform which does exactly what it says on the box and is fun to use. If you have any money left for Christmas this is the bit of kit to go for.

Firstly the fairly boring technical stuff: The item on review test is the Wintime Paintpal Deluxe from Paradise. Paradise consists of Ian Jeffray an ex-Oregan programmer who worked on the game *Burn Out* and wrote the driver software Dave Flynn, a graphic artist who presumably does all the artwork.

Ian then went on to form Paradise with Dave and released the games Inferno in 1996 and *Overload* in 2000. The company is now expanding into the hardware market with a range of graphics-related products of which the tablet is one.

The tablet itself is, as you might have guessed from the Wintime part of its name a standard PC item of kit and Paradise have produced the RISC OS drivers and some calibration and test software for the more discerning users of decent machines. That being said you do get the software to use the tablet on a PC should you so desire and so the package represents a real bargain as you get the best of both worlds.

I tested it for review purposes on my A7000+, my StrongARM Risc PC and my Windows 400Mhz Pentium II PC. Sorry about the last one on that list but for the sake of completeness... The PC software is fairly standard stuff but it does contain a good tutorial on cartoon drawing which is worth a look if you are interested.

As the illustration shows the tablet is a fairly small and compact unit measuring approximately 8x8 inches with a 5x4 inch active area. It's about the same size as a standard mouse mat and not much thicker. So space is not likely to be much of a problem at most workstations but more of the ergonomics later. By the way can I still give measurements in inches or am I bound by some European Directive to convert to a metric equivalent?

Input is via a combination of the tablet and a stylus. The stylus is fully configurable so that the normal mouse buttons can be mapped to a small switch on the side although the tip of the stylus is generally set at Select for obvious reasons. The stylus is truly pen-like and light and has no need of batteries or cords of any type. It becomes 'active' in the sense that the tablet reads input from it at about 3mm above the tablet. So from the point of view of moving the cursor or mouse pointer about the screen it does not need to make physical contact with the tablet. This is only required if you wish to actually draw or Select.

The tablet connects to the Acorn via the standard Serial port with an extension lead going to the keyboard port and the keyboard connecting to a through-connector. It really is one of those things that sounds complicated however written but is simplicity itself in practice. There is no power adapter as the power for the tablet is drawn from the computer and a reassuring green light on the top of the tablet signifies that all is connected correctly.

So the hardware is very simple to connect and all that remains is to install the drivers and other software. As we expect this is a simple drag and drop exercise from the enclosed driver disc. The main driver software is called *!Tablet* and there are two other programs: *!Scrawl* and *!Strokes*.

The great thing about the tablet and the driver software is that the software allows you to fully configure the tablet/stylus for how you want to use it. You are not stuck with any annoying defaults. You can configure the stylus, work area, the buttons as already mentioned, the serial port and the ability to make the tablet emulate the Eesox "PenPad".

Now this is the point where you might need to spend a little time getting the tablet calibrated to how you want to work. Notice here that you are not adapting to the hardware but that it should adapt to you — an important point often forgotten



drawn to it



except in the work of the Human — Computer Interface (HCI) specialists.

If you wish the tablet to respond only to slight pressure set it at that level or if you want it only to respond to more pressure set it at a higher level. This is simply done by moving a line on a graph. Again it is simpler to do than to describe but another advantage of the software is that it comes with an excellent HTML manual which fully describes that process.

I have included a screenshot of the pressure calibration part of the software.

The pressure is not only the degree of pressure you apply to the tablet with the stylus to get a response but also the thickness of that response. Let me explain — with a paintbrush or airgun or even a simple pencil the more pressure you apply the thicker the line subsequently produced. It's exactly the same with the stylus — it is far more than a simple pointing device.

The two other pieces of software are probably the weakest part of the package and should only be considered as test software for use in setting up the hardware to your personal preferences. After that they should quickly be discarded in favour of your own software. There is really no need to consider this other than as test software as we are particularly fortunate to be well provided for in this area from other software houses on the Acorn platform.

Which brings us nicely to your software and the uses of the tablet. As you might have guessed by now the package is ideally suited to any software which requires graphical input. Drawing and painting to you and me. That can range from the ubiquitous *Draw* and *Paint* to any of the more specialised and numerous software available for the platform.

As with all such hardware the tablet is not going to transform you into a better graphical artist but it can certainly act as an aid to productivity. If, for example, you wish to draw a freehand curve in a *DrawWorks* you can use that particular tool but with mouse it often looks less than freehand. You then have to adjust it using Bezier to produce the desired look. That is because a mouse cannot easily emulate the natural movement of a pen on paper. With the stylus and tablet you do just that. It can emulate the true 'look and feel' of how you might draw. It produces a more natural look.

To give you an example, I do not profess to any artistic ability in the sense of drawing and/or painting. That being said I could probably win the Turner Prize looking at some of the literal rubbish which is classed as art these days. However, since the first days of the mouse as a means of input — back before the Archimedes on the excellent Atari ST — I have used a mouse in my right hand. This is despite being very left-handed.

The stylus is so pen-like, however, that I could not use it in my right hand despite over 15 years of mouse use. It overrode my left handedness in the way a mouse has never done. A pen belongs in the hand I would naturally write, draw and paint with. It is, for me, more natural. In fact it is one of the few times being left handed presents one with an advantage as you can swap between mouse and tablet input instantly — no hand swapping. That being said the tablet/stylus acts as such a perfect mouse replacement that you might never go back to mouse use again.

This is a serious point. Many people now consider the mouse to be an unnatural method of computer

input — some going as far as to blame it for Repetitive Strain Injury. While I would not go that far, the pencil and the pen have been around for far longer and are certainly more 'natural'. The only adjustment you must make is to avoid looking at the stylus and to look at the screen. Not too difficult if you think about how you use a mouse.

So what did I use it on? Well, *Draw* and *Paint* as already mentioned as they are on every Acorn. To benefit properly from the tablet you can use it on whatever graphics package you wish to use. It works with all graphics software currently available on the RISC OS market the only proviso being that some packages do not 'know' about the tablet directly will require it to emulate Eesox's *PenPad* software. This is easily achieved via the configuration software.

Software included in this category are *Photodesk*, *ArtWorks* (if you wish to utilise the Pressure tool) and *Studio24Pro*. If you use these packages without the emulation you will not get any pressure sensing from the stylus tip.

In fact the device works with all software and could very easily be considered for far more than just graphical input. It really presents a viable alternative to the mouse as I have already mentioned.

So, in summary, you will have guessed that I was very impressed. Certainly the review model is not going back to Paradise which is always a good indication of how impressed I am as I will have to pay for it.

On a general point this is exactly the type of development we in the user community should be supporting. Whether it be in the production of drivers for new printers, mass storage devices, digital cameras or, as in this case, graphics tablets.

The Acorn market is never going to be big enough for the development of peripherals solely for use on Acorn machines. It is about producing good RISC OS drivers for hardware usually associated with PCs.

The bottom line is that this is good hardware with a sturdy and well thought out set of RiscOS drivers enabling users to get more from software new and old. The manual is a good example of how to do an on-line manual in that it is simple and to the point. It all costs only £65 plus £5 post and package and it gets onto my Highly Approved list of hardware peripherals for the Acorn. Do yourself a favour and buy one if you are prepared to invest some money and a little adjustment time into making the best use of it. END

Product details

Product:	Wintime Paintpal Deluxe with RISC OS drivers
Price:	£65 plus £5 p&p
Supplier:	Paradise, 38 Marlborough Drive, Sydenham, Leamington Spa, Warks CV31 1GD
Tel:	01926 315907
E-mail:	info@paradise-uk.net
Web:	www.paradise-uk.net





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Through th

You're invited to take a voyeuristic look at David Llewellyn-Jones' screen

Curiosity is a very natural human instinct. Tabloids capitalise on this, as do celebrity gossip magazines and docu-soaps. It's a weakness that even extends to this part of the RISC OS world. When I read through *Acorn User* I often find myself peering at the the bottom right hand corner of a screenshot in an attempt to work out which programs a reviewer has loaded and which icons have been edited to fit their particular desktop theme.

This new feature in *Acorn User* is set to lower the tone and delve in to the personal computer lives of RISC OS enthusiasts and celebrities.

To kick off, what better place to start than through the keyhole of my own humble set up. A quick glance indicates that its owner is definitely an enthusiast rather than a celebrity, you won't find much in the way of cutting edge Beta-test patches in my boot sequence.

There are a surprisingly large collection of solid regulars though, some of which can now be found as standard on RISC OS 4. I'm still using RISC OS 3.7 so *Filters* (Andrew Kemp), *raFS* (Richard Atterer), *X-files* (Wonderworks) and *3DPatch* (Matthew Bullock) still get a look in.

Figure I shows how my desktop boots up, with my Tasks and Apps directories open to show what's going on. I use *Freeze* for a fast start up; a marvellous utility by Kostas Proitsakis, it sends a copy of the machine's memory contents to disc and the whole lot can be reloaded at any time in just a couple of seconds. This means anything can be added or removed from my boot sequence while avoiding the usual time penalties.

One program which always catches people's attention is the eerie-looking eye which you can see in the screenshot. Written by Matthew Hammond, this was originally published in *Acorn User*'s very own *INFO a few years ago and, as you might expect, it follows the mouse pointer around in a very realistic manner.

You'll also find a number of other programs on my iconbar: Chris Morison's *Organizer* is a well known favourite; you'll notice it's one of the few icons I've actually changed as I'm a bit of a traditionalist when it comes to desktop themes. Even my backdrop is one of the standard Acorn ones, although there's no doubt that this does suit the 'grey' look of RISC OS.

I've also got *VirtuDesk*, my own virtual desktop program, the ubiquitous free memory display (this one from R.Casula), *SmartQuotes* which produces pretty apostrophes and, of course, *Zap*.

I spend a lot of time writing up maths using *LaTeX* and *Zap* is indispensable for this - you can see a somewhat busier desktop as it might look in use in Figure II where I have a collection of *LaTeX* utilities loaded.

I've used *MikTeX*, *WinEdit* and *Yap* under Windows for writing up my work. All of them are deservedly acclaimed on the platform, but the fact is that *Zap*, Dick Alstein's *SemTeX*, David Bryan's *SeeDVI* with Jakob Stoklund Olesen's port of the *LaTeX* document processor, plus the various other utilities which I use, offer practically the same level of

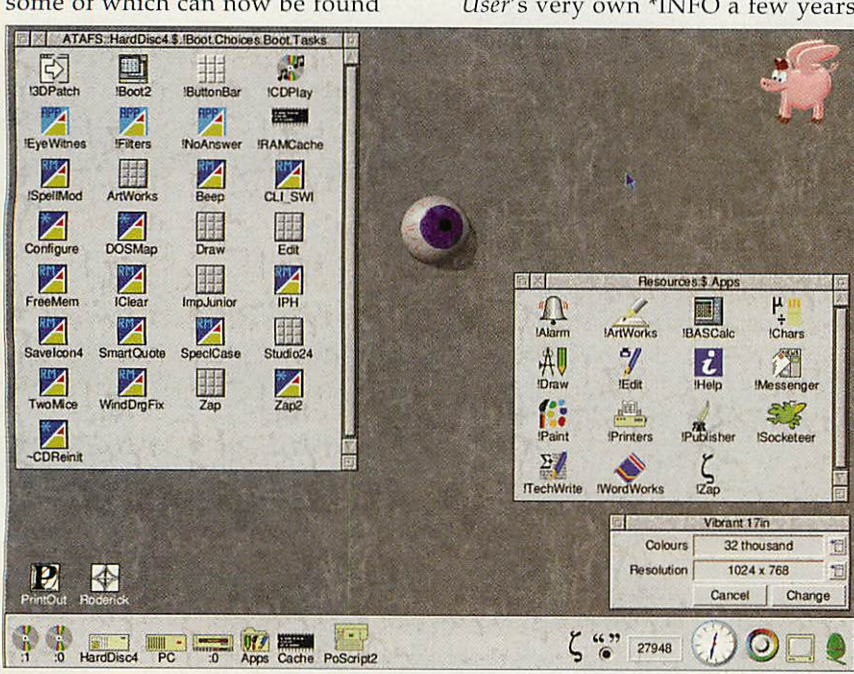
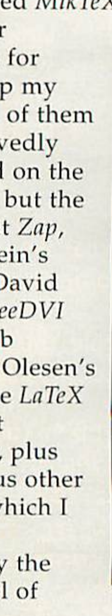


Figure I: My desktop straight after boot up, including Tasks and Apps directories


Figure III: The real desktop where

e monitor

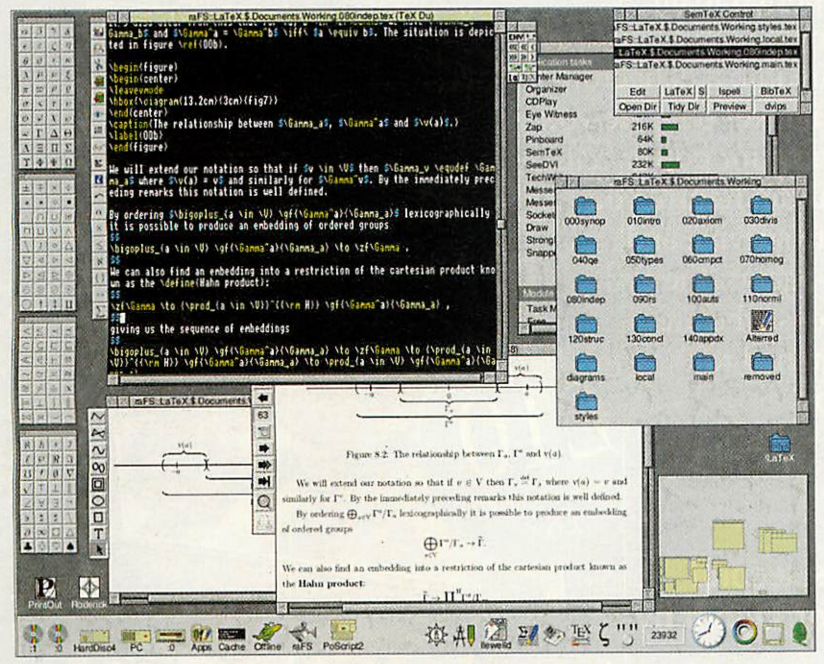


Figure II: Using LaTeX and friends on a busy desktop

features.

As far as I'm concerned they also allow good deal better productivity. It's not an area in which you'd expect RISC OS to excel, but I'd be happy to recommend it for this particular purpose. At this task it's at least as good as the competition.

The astute among you will have noticed that I don't use a proprietary application launcher. I've tried several but I still find the Apps directory suits my needs best and it fits perfectly with the ethos of the rest of RISC OS.

While we're on this side of the iconbar it's probably a good time to note a couple of other utilities that I have loaded all the time. The icon which looks like a RAM disc leads to a Filer window for *CacheFS*. This acts in much the same way as an ordinary RAM disc but in a more flexible manner, allowing the memory allocation to be changed dynamically in the same way as *Memphis*.

I also use an excellent CD controller by Leo White called *CDPlay*. This is opened and closed by clicking with the right mouse button on the CD drive icons and is particularly neat because, in addition to not taking up room on the icon bar, it is also very compact using just 44Kb of application memory.

This brings us to the end of this month's virtual tour, so finally, to put the whole Desktop in its proper setting, Figure III shows a shot of my real desktop — computer and all — especially tidied and posed in best *Hello* style.

So now it's over to you. If you have a particularly interesting or unusual set up (it doesn't even have to be RISC OS), or if you just want to welcome the RISC OS community into your virtual home, why not send in some screen shots and a brief description.

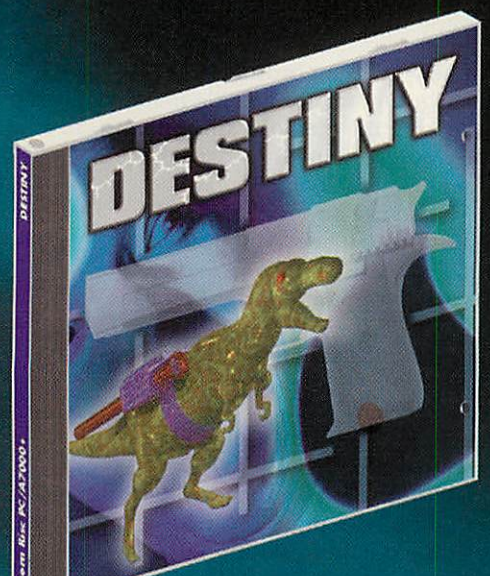
We guarantee to portray you in the best possible light and, in the meantime, I've put details of the programs, that can be found on my desktop, in the box opposite. Load them and you can reproduce what you see here in the comfort of your own home. END

Filters	**www.argonet.co.uk/users/parr/acorn/useful/app.html#Filters**
raFS	**www.informatik.tu-muenchen.de/~atterer/**
X-files	**www.wonderworks.co.uk/free/index.html**
3DPatch	**www.users.zetnet.co.uk/hawk/patches/**
Freeze	**http://users.otenet.gr/~gusuni**
Eye witness	Acorn User September 1997 (AUCD3)
Organizer	**www.organizer.morison. net/**
VirtuDesk	**www.mat.bham.ac.uk/llewelld/**
Zap	**www.zap.uk.eu.org**
LaTeX etc	**ftp://freenet.barnet.ac.uk/pub/Acorn/armtex/**
CDPlay	**www.brighteyes.u-net.com/html/download.html**

it all happens — computer, mess and all

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Not just a piece of coal

What might Santa bring for you this Christmas?

We thought that we would take a look at the kind of thing that you put on your list this Christmas that aren't the run-of-the-mill RISC OS connected products. Let's take a look and see what you might receive in your stocking.

Palm pad comfort

3M has come up with a neat little product that provides comfort for laptop users by cushioning wrists or palms against hard built-in surfaces that can cause pressure points.

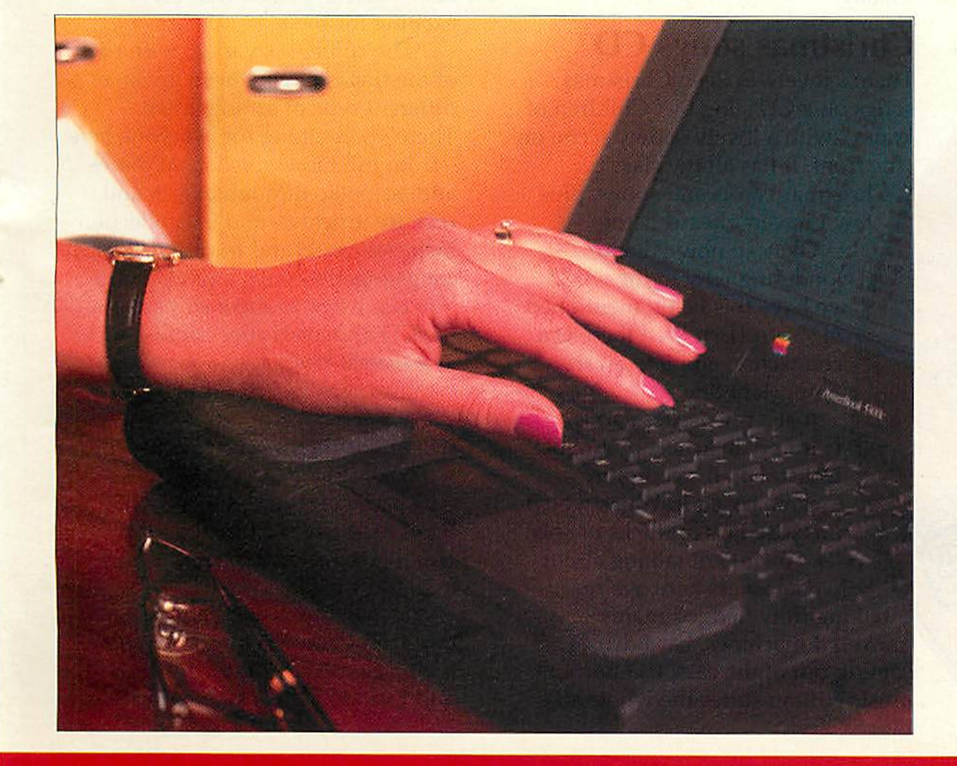
By helping to achieve a neutral wrist position these Notebook palm pads can help reduce the risk of carpal tunnel syndrome, which (so we are told here on the press release) is increasing in frequency.

Yes but we don't have any RISC OS notebooks, I hear you cry, well that's true right now but that might not be true after Christmas. No I can't say anything else about it, not even if you twist my arm or promise me Quality Streets.

These pads have a repositionable adhesive which means that you can take them off the notebook and put them back again later — it doesn't say how many times you can do this sensibly but they are only £9 ex VAT a few months of active surface would probably be worthwhile.

In a cross-over venture between 3M Health Care and the 3M technical side, these pads are made of a special therapeutic foam used in hospitals. The medical fabric covering provides a silky smooth surface that reduces heat and moisture build-up — it goes back to its original shape immediately the pressure comes off.

You can get them from all good office and computer supplies dealers. So there you go.



Putting on the gloves

Obviously health is in the air (in a very un-Christmassy sort of way) and the avoidance of repetitive strain injury (RSI) so if you don't fancy repositionable adhesive or perhaps you don't have a notebook for the Palm Pads, why not try the Glov.It.

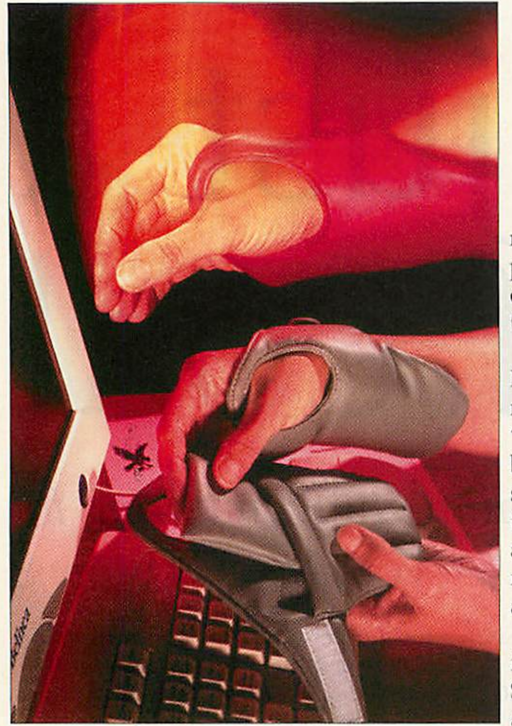
Yup, this is the Glov.It

To be honest this is not a bad idea, particularly in the workplace. As is pointed out here that most statistics related to RSI only count the cost of the cost to the State in terms of benefits paid out.

However with 500,000 people in the UK suffering from RSI if you start to add up factors such as re-training, reduced productivity, health service costs, unemployment and so on the cost is probably way in excess of the estimates.

And employers have a statutory duty to protect their staff — Midland Bank had to compensate staff claiming to be suffering from RSI following a court judgement in 1999.

So we have the Glov.It — lightweight, fully adjustable, suitable for right-handers or southpaws, it provides support for the wrist and hand and moulds around any area under pressure. using it helps



combat friction, muscle spasms, aches tension and trapped nerves.

I'm already beginning to get aches in my fingers and wrists just thinking about it.

When you buy a Glov.It that's not all you get, there are two additional pads: An extra firm one and a massage pad which are used in conjunction with the Glov.It to provide extra supprt if needed.

These pads are actually inserted into the Glov.It to give it that extra holding power with a choice of maximum wrist support or wrist support with massage — I really must get a pair of these to test out, I could do with a continuous massage throughout the day.

Tine Knight, MD of Nighthawk Electronics, who make the Glov.It, commented: "When people and organisations buy a PC they insure it in case something goes wrong. Mostly they forget about the people actually using the keyboard and mouse — but they need looking after too.

"RSI takes many forms including Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and Tendonitis which are very painful and difficult to cure. With the increased use of keyboards cases of RSI have greatly increased. Nowadays in the States more workers are injured using a keyboard than in any other way. We believe we have the answer, the use of Glov.It coupled with good posture will minimise the risk of developing RSI."

It comes in many colours, not just grey and red, and they will even put a corporate logo on it if you want. Santa is buying a whole set for the elves, each with a red nose on it.

Nighthawk Electronics 01799 549881

Christmas songs CD



There's lovely. Sixteen Christmas songs on a CD sung by "Children of Wales" with a lovely snowy scene on the front. It has all the classic Christmas carols and songs, plus a few I haven't heard before.

Okay so now you are wondering why in the world we have this being mentioned in *Acorn User*. Well there is a connection and it is a very important one:

Just a few issues ago we featured an article by Robbie Dobson on his company Arcania based in Wales which runs Risc PCs off racks of solar cells. We are not talking about Solo computers here, we're talking fully fledged mains powered machines, hard drives coming out of the ears, CD burners, music editing suites the whole shebang.

Well it just so happens that this CD was recorded at Robbie and Annie Dobson's Springstone studios and the graphi design and artwork carried out on a Risc PC running off solar energy only. Here's what they say about it:

"Smile Media Productions Ltd, a small production company in west Wales, has produced a festive CD – A Christmas Collection of Songs – sung by children from all over south Wales. This was recorded at Arcania's 24-track studio and mastered on a Strong ARM Risc PC using 100% solar power.

"Oregan's *MIDIWorks* was used for the initial sequencing work, !ProSound to record the tracks to hard disc, and all the trimming / fades, and so on, were carried out through their *StudioSound* software. *CDBlaze* from Cumana/ Canon Computing did the honours regarding the burning of the master CD-ROM.

"All artwork for the release was prepared by Arcania in *Compo* from Claires. The CD features children who would not otherwise have the opportunity to be heard, and none of them had been in a recording studio before so the project was very exciting for them.

"The content is varied, with each of the tracks having been given a different type of arrangement. There's something for everyone here – from full blown orchestral pieces and acapella, through to folk and rock treatments – and the collection includes carols and traditional festive songs together with four originals. You can listen to some snippets from the CD and also order copies online at **www.smile-media.com**"

Now personally I know that just every person reading this magazine will know at least one person who would really enjoy a CD like this. So get supporting the Save the Children Fund, because it's for charity, and you'll be supporting the RISC OS market as well.

You can order this direct from **www.Smile-Media.com** for just £10.99 including p&p for the UK and Europe.

END

Merry xmas from..

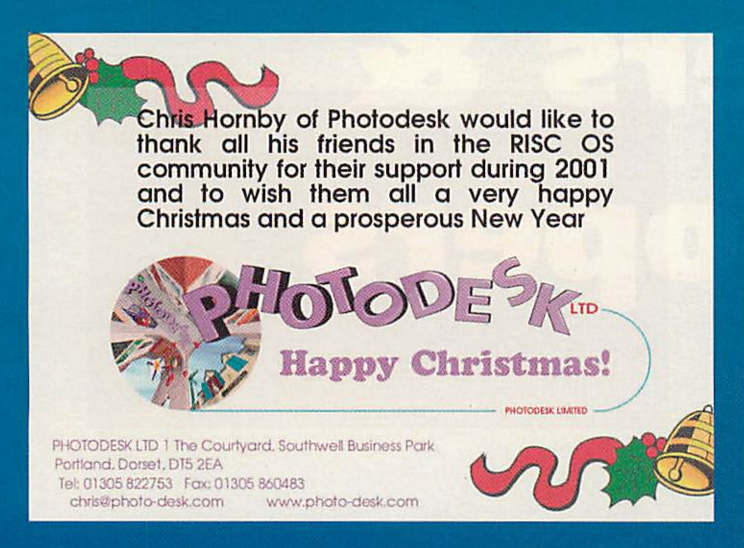
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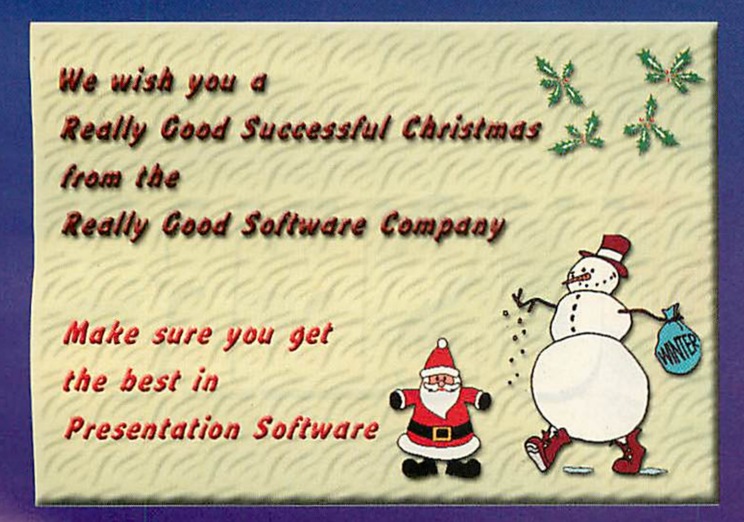


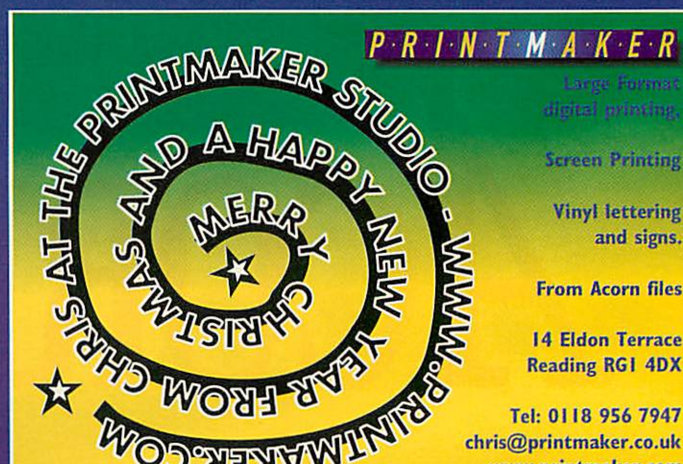












...and a very RISC OS New Year



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and speak to Keith Saye between 8am and 7pm

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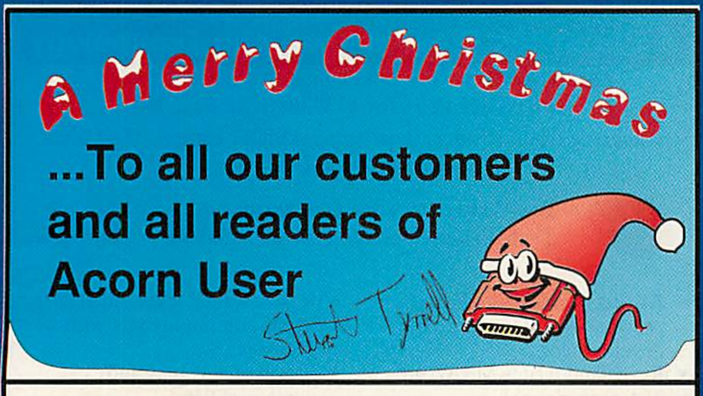
Tel. 0800 052 7918 / 01279 303878. Fax 0870 705 8397.



A very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from all of our staff here at RiscStation Ltd.









Stuart Tyrrell Developments
PO Box 183, OLDHAM OL2 8FB
Tel: 0845 458 8803 / 01706 848 600



TOP SECRET - DO NOT READ

Memorandum
From: Agent Itstimeyousentapaymentov
To: Agent Reallydoyouthinkimrich

Message Reads:-

It has come to my attention that Soft Rock Software wishes readers of Acorn User a happy christmas and new year, and as a seasonal gesture is offering WebChange, the excellent tool for web site designers and maintainers, to those readers at a bargain price of only £10 for a limited period.*

To order, quote the pass phrase "My name is not Boris and I am not Russian" and send a cheque/PO to:

Soft Rock software, 124 Marissal Road, Henbury, Bristol, BS10 7NP.

Further details about WebChange can be found at http://www.softrock.co.uk

Message ends.

* Offer closes 31/1/01





Superblast retro-gaming

Steve Turnbull gets behind the keyboard for a real blast from the past

Sitting comfortably? Then I will tell you a story... Once upon a time there was a little 8-bit computer and a little green lizard called Repton. And between them they managed to irritate and annoy a huge portion of the population. Me included.

Now it was said that the little green lizard had gone to the great puzzle game in the sky but now it's been resurrected and it's really irritating again.

Repton returns with every screen from the the classic Repton 3, through The Life of Repton, Around the World in 40 Screens and Repton Thru Time. Now when you consider that the first of these has three levels and the others have five each, while each level has eight screens you end up with 144 screens of pain.

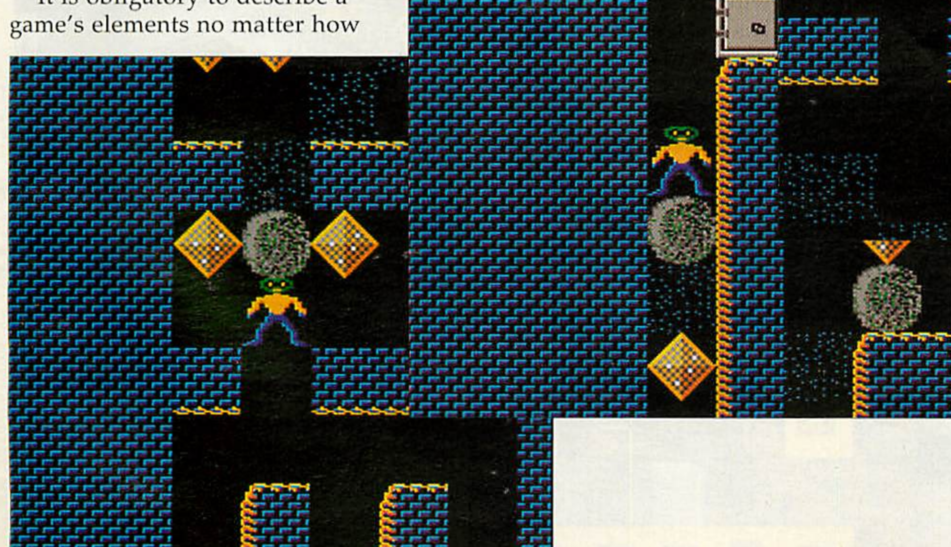
Repton is one of those games that found the perfect balance of complexity versus playability which keeps you coming back for more — glutton for punishment that you are.

It is obligatory to describe a game's elements no matter how well known they might be so here goes: The purpose of the game is to collect all the diamonds on the screen; use the key to convert solid object into more diamonds; collect the crown and then pass over the time bomb to finish (before it explodes).

Each level has a time limit but there are possible time extension objects. Then there are the boulders: in a strange twist of physical laws which assume that Repton is running round a maze, the boulders, when any support is removed, fall "down" the screen as far as they can go. Boulder support can be another boulder (although there is a tendency to roll off), any other solid object, or Repton himself. However a boulder rolling on to Repton terminates a life.

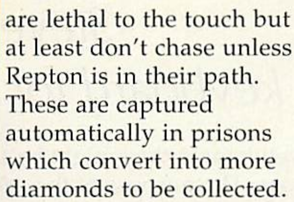
There are teleporters and sometimes there aren't, and sometimes there are things that look like teleporters which aren't. There are nasty creatures that hatch from eggs which break when disturbed — they fall like boulders — and then chase Repton around. They must be squished with other boulders. And then there are the "fairies" which follow a wall and







Repton (left and below) and Balloon Invaders (right)



are lethal to the touch but at least don't chase unless Repton is in their path. These are captured automatically in prisons which convert into more diamonds to be collected.

All these elements go together to create fiendish puzzles which consist mainly of "how do I collect all the diamonds without that boulder falling (a) on my head or (b) into a position which blocks further progress."

Just to add to the complexity the different sections of the games beyond the classic use different graphics for the same game elements.

This version runs at the right speed on any RISC OS machine, it works either taking over the Desktop or running in a window. Plus it has a screen designer so you can create your own horrible screens and exchange them with your enemies.

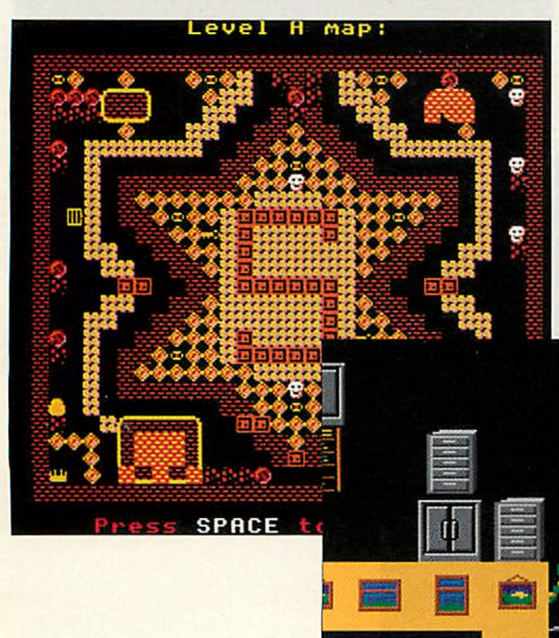
If you want a little retro-fun for Christmas this is definitely one to go for, as is the other games CD from APDL, the GEK collection.

I will describe these games briefly and in alphabetical order, but on the whole I think it's easier to let the screenshots tell the story.

AstroSmash is not something I'd come across and although it has a certain naive charm it is definitely the poor relation of this collection. Basically it is a form of *Space Invaders*, you sit on the bottom of the screen and things come down at you to be shot at and destroyed.

It does have a few twists, like







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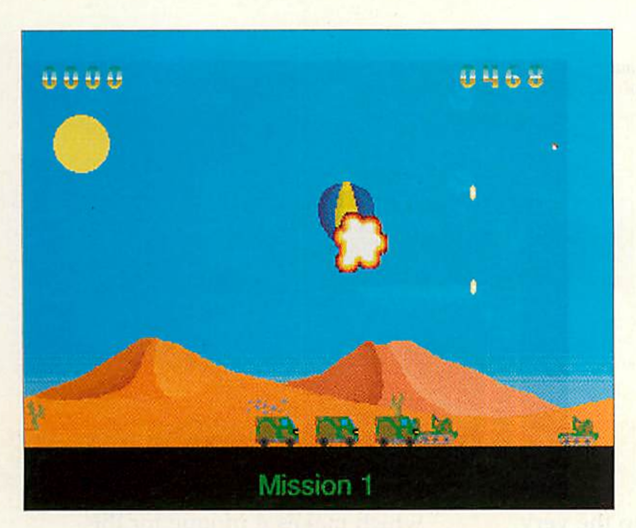
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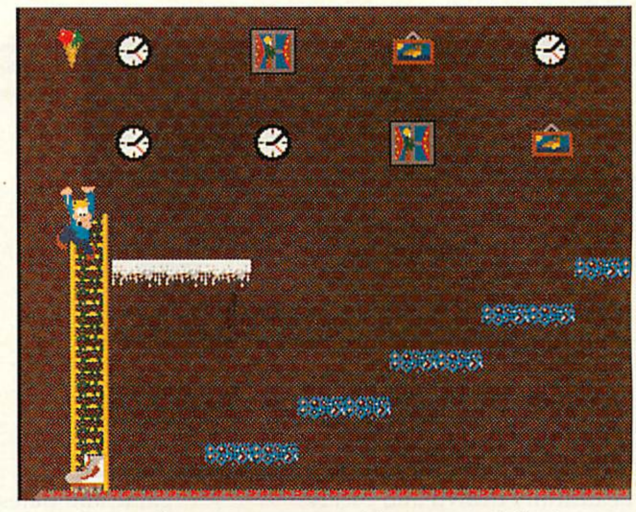


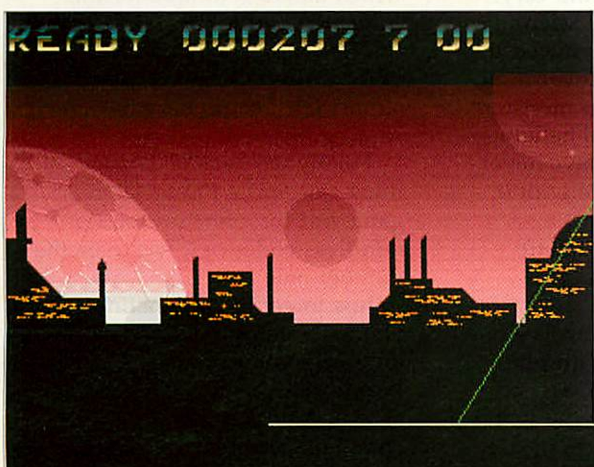




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the missiles that come at you sideways and the laser that slowly sweeps across the screen and is impossible to avoid — except that you do have your random hyperspace jump which will hopefully jump you to the other side of the oncoming problem.

Visually fun but lacking real excitement.

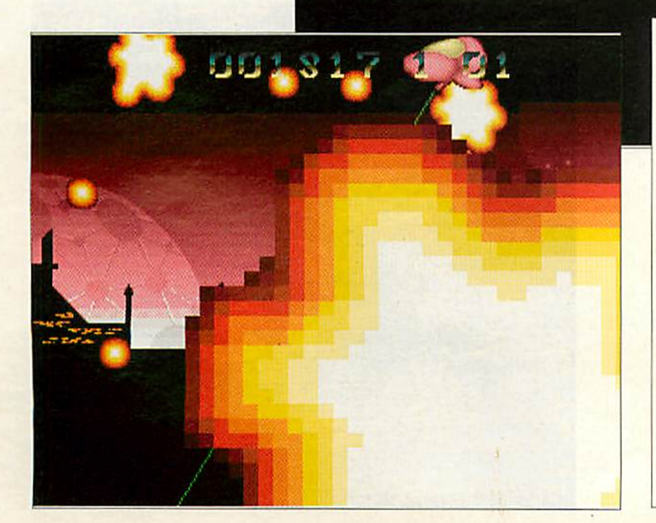
Ballon Invaders I have played before and I liked it as little then as I do now. Perhaps less. It's a sort of Space Invaders in reverse, you float around above the baddies who shot up at you. However it is complicated by the fact that you have to keep the ballon filled to maintain and adjust altitude.

This game is actually mission based rather than level based which is an interesting idea however as I could not play it at all I never found out whether it was really any good. The main problem appeared to be the game running too fast.

Then we have *Emotions*, this is the piece de resistance of the whole set, graphically, musically and game playability. I loved it. Unfortunately it wouldn't take screenshots for me so I can't show you how wonderful it is.

You are introduced to the game by a long cartoon section which is

The calm (right) before the storm (below), I do wonder what the football on the backdrop is?







Joop could be left out altogther but some may like it



beautifully drawn and nicely animated. Then you move into the game proper, the attention to detail is excellent and the music keeps you bobbing along.

Strictly speaking it is just a platform game but it is far more sophisticated than that. Your little character goes around solving puzzles by moving blocks and piling them one on top of another then climbing on them.

Armed only with a chainsaw he must collect the funny little yellow faces (which express different emotions, I think) and stave off the nasty things.

I really liked this game.

Euroblaster is a smooth shoot'em up in the Galaxians style with waves of aliens flying extremely smoothly across the screen to be blasted by your little ship with megaloads of power. Not much else to say on it except it is fun.

Frak is also on this collection — this has always been a very odd game and dates back to the very earliest times of the BBC Micro. This version has been reviewed in *Acorn User* and I won't cover it all again here. Yoyo's versus monsters, flying daggers and lethal balloons, in 1983 it was radical I have never been entirely comfortable with it. Unfortunately we have no screenshots because the palette colours would not save out correctly.

Joop is a ladders and levels game with no plot, fairly poor graphics and I found it boring. On second thoughts *this* is probably the worst game in the collection.

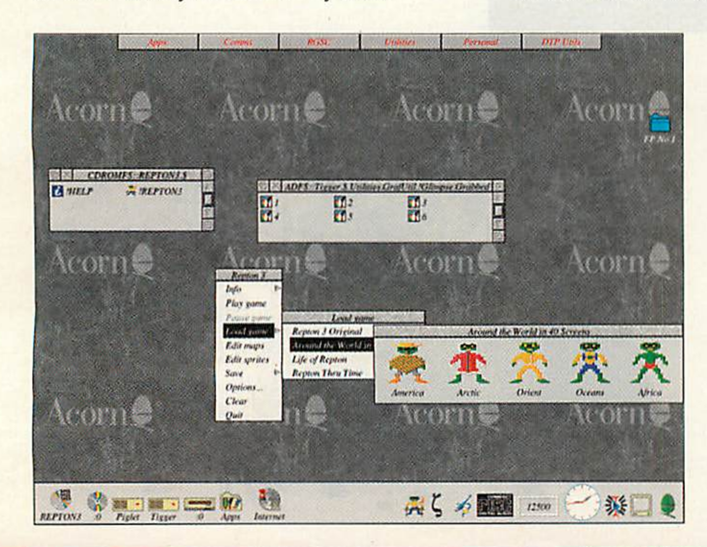
It may come as a surprise to some but I had never played *Joust* until today. But I like it! The basic concept is that you are riding a flying bird thing and you are wearing armour and carrying a lance. You then deliberately bump into other flying knights and win points ... or not.

It is a one or two player game which makes it unique for this collection and makes it even more fun for Christmas. I liked the graphics and the game play, I almost felt I could hear the crowd singing "We will rock you".

Finally we have *NoWindows*, I think this was a Public Domain game but for a few minutes of mindless violence it has to be the number one.

Just to get the adrenaline going you have the Windows start-up jingle when the game starts then Windows icons fly out of the screen at you. And you target the crosshairs and blast the little buggers, I'm proud of my 94% high score and not ashamed of my 69% lowest. All in all this is a decent collection of games the good ones certainly far outweigh the bad ones so it is not a waste of money by any means.

Who said nostalgia isn't what it used to be? Let's wallow! **END**





Starry infor

David Llewellyn-Jones looks at the stars in his RISC OS computer

One of the best features of RISC OS is generally considered to be the ease of use associated with the Desktop. Ideally, then, there would never be any need to stray outside of this comforting environment and for many users this may well be the case.

Nonetheless, scratch just a bit beneath the surface and you find that there is a very powerful system of commands which you can use to give you even more control of your computer. These are known as the star commands and have been inherited from the original BBC Micro days. Over the next few months I hope to explain some of the benefits which using them can bring.

To begin, I'll describe the basics of using * commands, provide some examples, and hopefully explain how you can discover more * commands for yourself. Although I won't assume any prior knowledge of their use, a familiarity with the Desktop will be very helpful.

Let's start at the beginning. Turn the computer on and you are presented with your start-up desktop, but it's not clear from here how you would go about entering any commands. Certainly you'll be typing them at the keyboard since mouse prodding is not going to be sophisticated enough, but if you just type away there probably won't be any obvious effect (unless you're running some sort of application, of course).

At some stage most users will probably have hit the F12 key by accident and been left with a dead desktop and an asterisk at the bottom lefthand corner of the screen. It's this little * where all of the action takes place, indeed it's this that gives them the title '* commands'.

Figure I: Creating a task window

Unfortunately although pressing F12 is the easiest way of getting to the * prompt, it's also the worst; a much better solution is to open a *task window*. This will allow you to enter commands in a window on the Desktop. Done this way the commands will execute in the background and allow you to use other applications at the same time.

There are a couple of ways to open a task window. For the first you should choose the Task window option from the menu you get by clicking with the middle mouse button over the RISC OS icon at the bottom right hand corner of the screen (this looks like a multi-coloured cube in RISC OS 4, the green Acorn nut logo on earlier versions, as you can see in Figure I, or even the green cog of RISC OS 4+).

Alternatively you can simply hold down one of the Ctrl keys and press F12 once. Be careful not to accidentally hold down the Shift key at the same time as this would shut down your computer, which would be no good at all.

At this point a window should appear — this time with a * in the top left hand corner — and you're ready to go.

A task window needs a text editor to work properly and, on a brand new machine, a copy of *Edit* will automatically be loaded for use so that the task window is actually running *via Edit* itself.

A lot of people prefer to use *Zap*, an alternative editor and the screenshots which I'll use will come from *Zap*, hence the colours may be different from those you would get with *Edit*. Should you use *StrongEd*, a third alternative, there will be other minor differences in the display. This doesn't actually matter: it's the text which is important and Edit will work just as well.

So you've got your * prompt, what do you do now? Well, you can start entering commands straight away, but it might be worthwhile explaining a little about how * commands work first. The best way to start, then, is to type Help followed by Return, which should give output similar to that shown in Figure II.

The commands are not case sensitive, so typing Help has the same effect as typing HELP or HeLp. As you can see from the output, there are a number of further help options available; the syntax of the command as it describes it is:

```
Help <subject>
```

and these angle brackets mean that you can replace the text by something meaningful. Just typing help results in the suggestion of replacing <subject> with: Commands, FileCommands, Modules or Syntax. At this stage the most useful subject is syntax, so type

```
Help Syntax
```

to get the information shown in Figure III.

This gives details of the format in which further help requests will respond and, as you can see, the angle brackets which we just

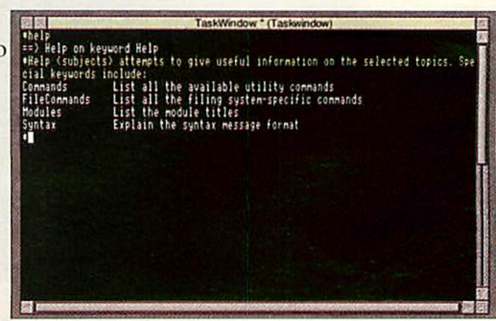


Figure II: The Help command

mation



Figure III: The Help Syntax command

encountered are described there as well.

Now one of the most useful things the help command will let you do is give the help text for a *particular* command. For example, there is a * command called 'Filer_Run' which allows you to simulate the effect of clicking on a file in a Filer window. We'll come on to exactly what this command does in a later article, but for the time being to find out more about it you could type

```
Help Filer_Run
```

and it will give an explanation of the command and its syntax. You can also truncate the name of a command by using a full stop. For example you could have typed

```
Help Filer_R.
```

to receive the same response. Almost all commands can be truncated in this way, with the consequence that you can display *all* of the help information in your computer by typing:

```
Help .
```

(note the full stop at the end). Be warned, though, that when I typed

```
TaskWindow * (Taskwindow)
FileCommands   List all the filing system-specific commands
Modules        List the module titles
Syntax         Explain the syntax message format
*Help Syntax
==> Help on keyword Syntax
Symbols used in syntax descriptions:
<> mark sections to be filled in, e.g. <filename> indicates that a filename shou
ld be supplied here.
[] mark optional sections.
| indicates a choice, e.g. "A|B" means "A or B".
*Help Filer_Run
==> Help on keyword Filer_Run
*Filer_Run is equivalent of double clicking on an object
Syntax: *Filer_Run <file>|<application>
*Help Filer_R.
==> Help on keyword Filer_Run
*Filer_Run is equivalent of double clicking on an object
Syntax: *Filer_Run <file>|<application>
*Help .
```

[Figure IV: The window just before it fills and fills

this on my StrongARM Risc PC it took nearly a minute to scroll through all of the information. Figure IV shows what your screen may look like just before entering this final command.

Unfortunately help won't always provide you with the information you need. This is because there are two different types of command under RISC OS: those in memory and those on disc.

When you type a * command, such as Help, the operating system first searches through all of the commands that are in memory (stored in 'Modules') and if it can't find a match it then looks on disc, starting with your library directory (usually set to $.!Boot.Library) and then in the currently selected directory.

I'll explain a little more about these later, but what this means is that you can, for example, add new commands to your system just by putting a utility in your library directory. The utility would simply be written to perform the action of the command; it's a very versatile system.

Should you have access to another operating system you may be able to see that under DOS there is no distinction between commands on disc and those in memory, since all of them are held as utilities on disc. Using Windows, you can see all these DOS utilities by opening the folder C:\Windows\Command using Windows *Explorer* (see Figure V).

A similar method is used on Unix, as both of these systems are really disc-based operating systems.

As I've already said, RISC OS is somewhat different since modules can be kept in memory allowing large parts of the operating system to be held ready for use in RAM or ROM and these can supply their own * commands.

To get back to my original point, though, help will usually only supply information about those commands held in memory. For the utilities in your library directory, often just typing the name of the utility without any parameters will give a brief summary of what the 'command' does. Alternatively, some commands use a -h prefix, for example you would have to type tidy -h to get help about the tidy utility if it were in your library.

There's one further, readily



Figure V: All DOS commands are held as files on disc under Windows 95

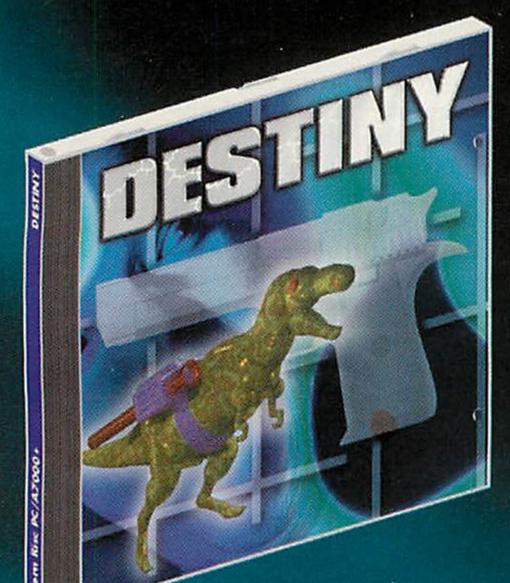
available, way of accessing help information and that's using the *StrongHelp* manual for * commands. If you don't already have this (it won't necessarily have been supplied with your computer) there's a link to it from the *Acorn User* Web site.

Having thoroughly mastered the art of getting help from the computer, it's now time to actually get it to do something and this will be the topic of next month's article. We'll look at how you can move around your hard disc and run programs from the command line, and I'll also provide you with some of the more useful commands which do things that are tricky to do from the Desktop.

In the meantime why not have a go with a few yourself? Remember to read the help text first as some commands can be quite powerful and may do unexpected things but looking at the help files can only do good — for your understanding of your RISC OS computer.

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The premier UK Education show draws nearer and the organisers have announced a "Goes to the Movies" feature in this year's event. With the aim to showcase the creative and educational role that film and film-making can play in teaching and learning for a range of curriculum subjects.

Pooling the experiences of the British Film Institute and Ultralab among others, pupils will be involved in running live broadcasts at the Show, script writing, news reporting, editing, scheduling and delivering. Cary Bazalgate from the BFI remarked: "Creative and critical competence with moving images will soon become an accepted part of everyone's basic literacy entitlement."

Here are some of the new hardware and software developments to keep an eye on:

Digital additions

TAG (**www.taglearning.com**) will be unveiling a new range of digital peripherals including a new low-cost digital video camera, high res still cameras and sound recording devices as well as photo/media manipulation packages and new multimedia tools that fully integrate with the Internet.

Where in the world?

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Show details

Where?	9-12 January
When?	Olympia, London
How?	**www.bettshow.com**

REM Pride

Rickett Education Media — **www.r-e-m.co.uk** — have produced their latest Primary catalogue for 2 to 11-year olds. Covering school administration programs to mice, digital cameras, touch screens and software REM pride themselves on being an independent supplier and reviews of some of the products they supply are available on line courtesy of TEEM with schools and registered ICT advisors being able to try items on approval.

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The service is available for a fixed cost the only equipment you need is a computer connected to the Internet. No downloads are needed, no software, FTP access or uploads. Users just log on with their password and ID and then you can move around but as the site manager you see edit buttons on each button, click this change the information and click save. The new version is then instantly accessible and live.

For schools a customised version of the Internet Kit web site creation software is provided free. For more information visit **www.schools.ik.com**

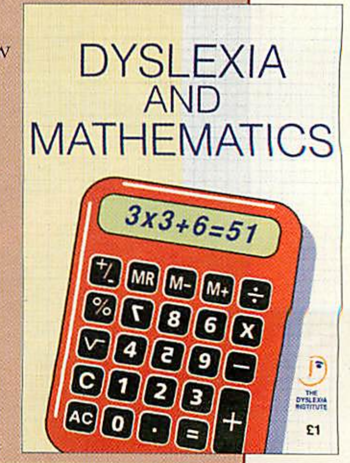


New way out

This year's Dyslexia Awareness Week focussed on Dyslexia and Maths. Research over the past twenty years has indicated that difficulties in language usually go with those in maths. While some dyslexic students are gifted problem solvers many struggle with other aspects because of factors such as slow speed of information processing, poor sequencing skills, poor short term memory and weak literacy skills.

The Dyslexia Institute has developed its own maths programme and has specially trained maths tutors but now they have produced a new booklet called Dyslexia and Mathematics which outlines some of the problems involved and gives useful guidance to parents.

Find out more at **www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk**



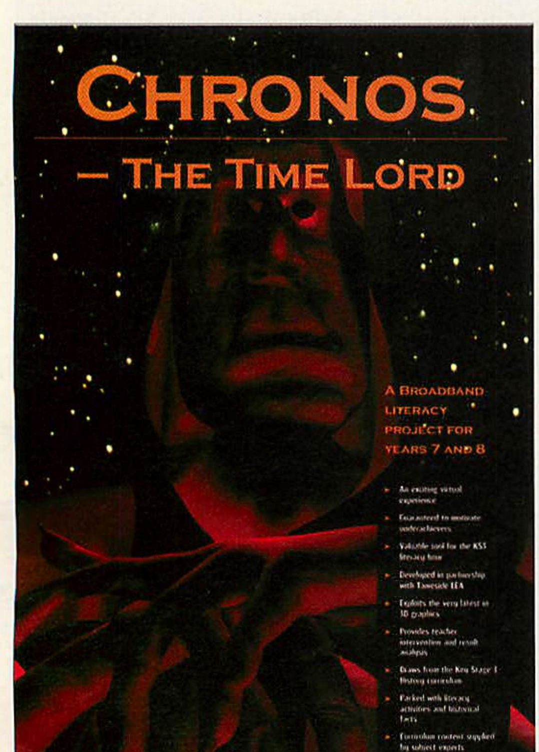


worksheets on a range of topics as well as ideas and guidance on setting up maps, worksheets and courseware reports. Similar to commercial GIS programs it supports the Year 7 to A Level geography curriculum and has examples of data, maps and fieldwork exercises familiar to schools.

The Advisory Unit will also be demonstrating a new extension pack for its Weather Reporter. Further information is available at **www.advisory-unit.org.uk**

New phoenix

Europress Software (+44/0 1625 855000) have risen from the ashes of corporate take-overs to develop a new A Level Geography revision program which breaks down the curriculum into 280 mind maps covering all the elements of effective revision. Also look out for their new SATs revision range of 12 programs for SATs at 7, 11 and 14.



Europress has also launched a subsidiary — Broadband Education Technologies (BET). This takes the form of a partnership which allows Local Education Authorities, Education Action Zones, as well as individual schools, to make money from products developed in partnership with BET, but also to ensure that broadband e-learning programs meet their needs.

One example of this is *Chronos — The Time Lord*. A broadband literacy project for Years 7 and 8 has been produced BET and Tameside LEA. Joining Chronos on three missions with a literacy and historical focus each mission covers spelling, cloze, sequencing, writing frames and comprehension.

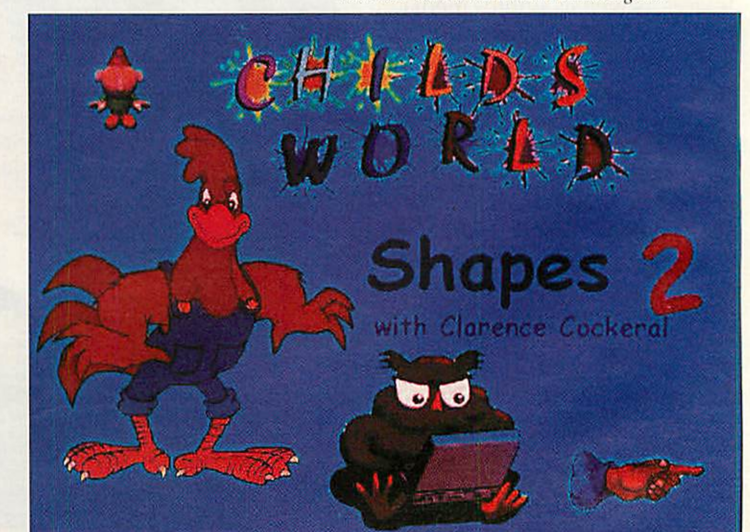
Branching turtles

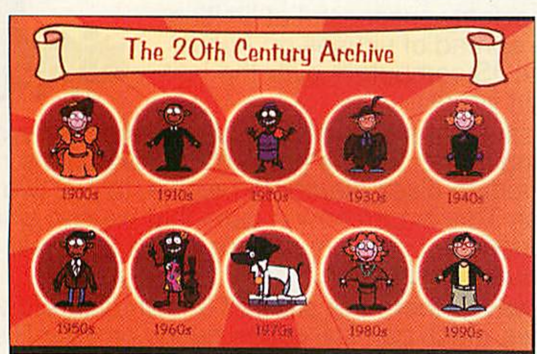
Softease (**www.textease.com**) are branching out with a new a branching database program. Called *Textease Branch* pupils learn to classify information and gradually build up a database by providing 'yes' and 'no' answers they set themselves. Answering the questions builds up a binary tree that can be viewed on screen.

The poster printing facility allows the whole tree to be printed onto A4 sheets to make into a classroom poster. *Textease Branch* also uses the power of Textease 2000 to enable a full multimedia function to be added to the branching database.

Another new program will be released at the same time, *Textease*

EduTech intrduces their new version of LessonMaker – the complete ICT Scheme of Work for KS1 and KS2 now with a multimedia authoring tool





Turtle. A control program which allows children to explore distances and angles. At its simplest level, on-screen buttons are used to control the movement of a traditional turtle. However, any *Textease* object can be named and used as a turtle whether it's a simple shape, photograph or piece of clip-art. Advanced control can provide interesting multimedia shows or Web designs.

The notes have it

Music lovers should take a look at Muzantiks a Key Stage 2 music composition and performance Web site that explores the arts, science and technology which works in conjunction with **keep-up-to-date.tv** a new concept in e-learning, created in partnership with Redbus CPD, with video-rich modules using the latest Web technologies to deliver full-screen learning experiences over the Web. Alternatively, the Web site can be used in the classroom to complement more traditional teaching methods.

BETT will also see **keep-up-to-date.tv**'s launch of a dedicated channel for continuing Professional Development which enables teachers and others to constantly update their training without travelling long distances to conferences and the like. Subscribers are required to watch a series of full-motion online video programmes and take part in multimedia activities the results of which are fed back to the accreditation centre. For more information contact +44/0 207 739 4908.

Current affairs

Espresso will use BETT to launch its Secondary broadband service. Incorporating high quality video footage, multimedia activities, worksheets and Web sites it comes with detailed teacher support notes.

Targeted at Key Stage 3 students, the cartoon characters in the original primary service have been replaced with animated teachers who guide students through subject areas. Espresso has created banks covering English, French, and PHSE.

In addition there is a homework service designed for narrowband connection so that children can get connected from home. Lesson resources are based around current and topical television programmes and news reports.

Primary Espresso is not to be left out though. With over 400 subscribing schools soon be able to access a 20th Century Archive. Aimed at Key Stage 2, it brings to life major historical events. In addition, Story Starts is another new section which combines video with supporting photos and activity worksheets.

Covering four genres: Adventure, Funny, Scary and Amazing stories include The Hamster with a Bus Pass and The Flying Sheepdog and are supported by activities such as interactive story books or word games. For a sneak preview log onto **www.espresso.co.uk**

Speak to me

Spruce up your modern languages with Channel 4 Modern Languages Web site (**www.LTScotland.com/5-14/C4modern languages**) which has been designed to support and complement the Channel 4 series *Chez Mimi* and *Hennings Haus* at home and school in a fun way.

Both TV series support the teaching of French and German in Key Stage 2/3 and the Web site builds on the characters and situations. Featuring ten games for each language, a vocabulary sections details the words to be used throughout the site.

A teacher's set provides a description of the games and learning outcomes and suggestions to extend the games into the classroom.

Most games come with three levels of difficulty children can work at their speed and offer colourful and entertaining ways to develop language skills and develop vocabulary. END

BETT speakers

This year's keynote speakers will be Professor David Reynolds talking about the future of ICT in education while Professor Ted Wragg will ask if curriculum demands are stifling the creative use of ICT in the classroom.

On Friday Peter Houston (the Director General for Schools) will talk ask whether ICT can really transform schools. Final keynote speaker on Saturday is Professor Stephen Heppell who will talk about creative children in a digital age.

BETT Seminars

There are over 45 sessions in four seminar theatres over four days, New to the programme of seminars for 2002 is a session for school governors covering the duties of the Governing Body with reference to ICT and a seminar on the role of film in education from the British Film Institute.

For 2002 Wednesday and Thursday sessions focus on Special Needs/HE and Management, with Friday and Saturday covering curriculum subjects. For instance, science teachers have the opportunity of listening to Nigel Paine talking about the strategy behind Science Year and the role ICT can play in trying to change young people's attitudes to science. Then John Wardle of the Science Consortium will be assessing the benefits of using ICT to teach science, while Roger Frost will be looking at resources for ICT in science.

The National Grid for Learning was launched at BETT in 1999 and with the four year programme now drawing to an end, Doug Brown will be speaking on behalf of the DfES about the initiative and where we go from here.



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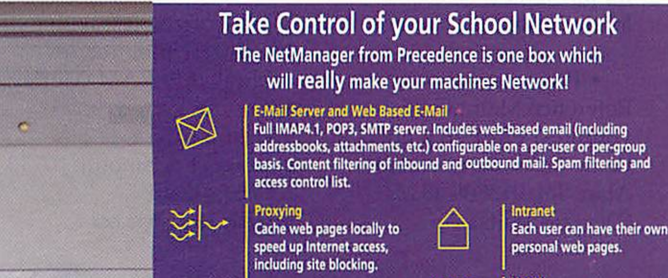
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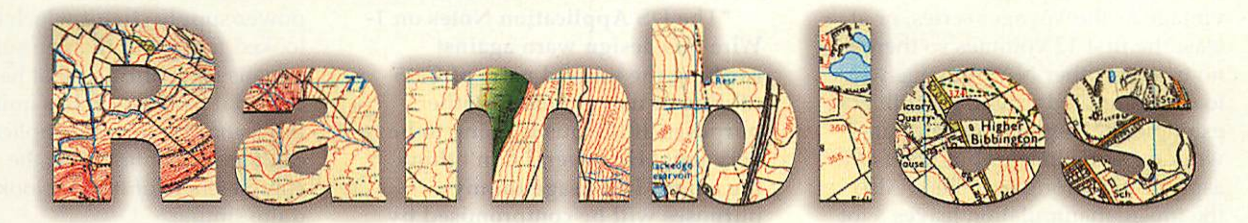
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RISC OS



Mike Cook buys another round for RISC OS users

I was saddened to hear of the untimely death in a fire of Mike Wilson from the Wakefield Computer Society. Although confined to a wheelchair in the last few years his enthusiasm and humour were an example to us younger ones. Certainly his laugh permeating through an audience was better than any warm-up man in my annual talks to the society, giving some stories a better response than I thought they might receive. He will be sadly missed.

if you have followed my articles and projects over the years I am sure you know that I have an interest in generating stereo images on computers. For some time I have been looking for a stereo camera, one that takes two pictures at the same time from slightly different positions. To this end I have been keeping my eye on the Ebay auction site on the Net. However, I was surprised the other day to discover a camera that takes four pictures simultaneously so, intrigued, I made some investigations.

It turns out this sort of thing is known as lenticular imaging and is a way of producing 3D images on a single printed sheet. You may have seen 3D postcards on sale at tourist locations, the pictures are printed under a layer of fine plastic ribs. These allow only one image at a time to be seen, rather like those cards you get in packets of breakfast serial that appear to have moving images when you tilt it slightly backwards and forwards.

Apparently you can get people to print you own versions of this. What I am really after actually is a companion to my Apple Quicktake 100 camera so that I can do some electronic 3D picture taking but I can't seem to find a secondhand one. So if you know of one please let me know and we might have some more interesting things to ramble on about.

alex@alex writes with some problems he has had upgrading:



"Having taken the plunge and gone for upgrading to RISC OS 4 I have now installed the software and changed the hardware and still have a working computer except for one little problem, my Iomega Zip Drive. Once the chips are installed it will not read discs formatted in RISC OS, only gives 'broken directory' error message.

"The system will read and write to discs in DOSFS format but trying to reformat to DOSFS results in error message 'Disc not understood'. Appeals to Surftec (Alsystems are no longer in the RISC OS market) and Gary Partis have not achieved any help. I am hoping you may be able to shed some light on my dilemma, I am using Alsystems Power-tec with *PowerManager* v1.90 and ZipFS v1.42.

"As I have numerous Zip discs containing data and intend to use this medium to backup prior to reformatting my hard drive the current situation is a concern. A downloaded read-only copy of *ZipFSLite* from Partis did not alter the problem."



I had a quick word with RISC OS Support and they said that this is a standard problem with AlSystems SCSI cards and the solution is thankfully quite simple, all you have to do is unplug the DOSMount module from the SCSI card using the *UNPLUG command.

Gary Hughes liked my articles on PDS images and the NASA image files but had a question:



"I noted, with interest, your recent articles on using PDS images. I have a copy of *PDSView*, along with three CDs of Voyager data. I can view the images with no problems (apart from having to use CDROMFS). Given the age of PDSView, are there any NASA missions where the PDS data cannot be viewed by PDSView?"



I too have a copy of *PDSView* and while it was quite advanced in its day, those days were when our computer only had a 256-colour display. This was not a conventional 8-bit colour display because the palette was fixed, this meant that a lot of image processing that relies on manipulating the palette couldn't be done. Also this meant that there are only 16 shades of gray available.

Unfortunately when they built the Risc PC the software was done in such a way as to lock the palette in the 256 colour mode so it was no better. You could obtain better results in the 16-bit and 24-bit modes but these have no palette so palette manipulation was a no go.

Also *PDSView*, or at least my copy, was not very compatible with the Risc PC even in 256 color mode, the results are rather unpredictable. For example if you put the computer into 256 grey scale and then do any palette manipulation you are thrown

back into 256-colour mode with a screwed up palette.

Anyway this program is the same vintage as the Voyager series, or at least the first 12 volumes so there is no trouble, other NASA image work to only a limited extent, if at all. For example the digital maps of Mars work on some images but it gets the aspect ratio wrong on others. Also the image manipulation leaves a lot to be desired on this set. It displays the Magellan images but at only half the X resolution and the results look grainy. You get nothing at all on the Gallieo, pre-Magellan and Viking Lander sets despite them being 8-bit images and it won't touch the 16-bit or 32-bit images in the Einstein x-ray observatory set or the Mars explorer set.

For older machines it is probably the best image processor there was but it is not up to driving today's hardware.

Now onto the continuing saga of Robin Hampshire, if you remember last month he was looking to use the 1-Wire bus for his heating controller, he has now sent a progress report:



"Since my last e-mail to you I have come on in leaps and bounds, relatively speaking. I have acquired a 1-Wire weather station from the company in Mexico which have taken over production from Dallas Semi, and got a pleasant surprise with it.

"The interface plug supplied with the kit is the DS9097U, which is based on the DS2480b chip and comes ready set up for any 12V serial port. You just plug one end into the serial port, and the other end is an RJ11 socket which takes the supplied length of data cable (c/w plug). I also read in the data sheet for that device (my collection of data sheets gleaned from the Dallas Semi Web site and printed out now fills a large loose-leaf binder) that the DS9097U/DS2480b is a true-ground device.

"The 5V power supply which I built for my IIC circuits is a +/- 5V supply, but the common ground is floating. I include a sketch of its layout, and my proposed use of the +ve part in the 1-Wire set-up. If it is suitable, I shall probably rebuild it using the +5V bits but spanning both output coils in parallel to make the load more balanced.

"The DS Application Notes on 1-Wire bus design warn against earthing the unused pairs of Cat5 cabling or using them for other purposes, if the bus is going to be very long. However, I don't think the length I envisage for my purposes will be compromised by using one of the spare wires to carry 5V around the bus. It may even come in handy as a power source for the temp sensors, so that I can do temp conversions from all of my zones at once.

"I would value your advice with regard to my proposed powering of the I/O chips. Each Solid State Relay input current at 5V will be 10.5mA (RS spec) and if I have 20 zones there is a max theoretical current requirement of 210 mA from the power source.

"Getting to grips with the DS2480b chip has been fairly rewarding. It has its own algorithm for doing a ROM ID search, and it differs from the algorithm you gave in RTR63 in that each search starts from the LSB — the other end from your search. In a nutshell, the user tells the DS2480 which way to go whenever there is a conflict, and the chip then reports back to the user how many conflicts, and where, it encountered on each pass.

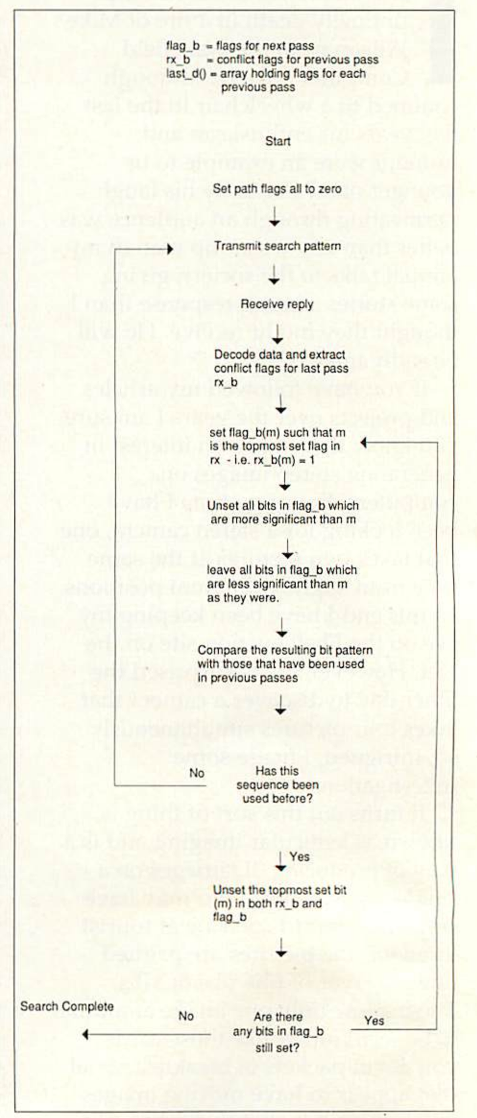
"I spent several evenings with graph paper, pencils and rubber to come up with an algorithm of my own which will now work with any combination of devices, and, as I can dimension arrays on the fly, the only thing that is stopping me from going out and buying 2^48 chips to test it on, is the knowledge that you've already got six of them so I can't. I also attach a flow diagram of my algorithm for your info.

"Anyway, thanks for all your help so far — I look forward to hearing from you with the bits I'm still unsure about."

If that is the only thing stopping you from purchasing that many devices is that I have some you mustn't be short of money. Assuming they were 1p each then it would cost you £2,814,749,767,106 and 60p, I can think of better things to spend the money on.

I have had a look at Robin's power supply circuit which at first looked faulty but then on subsequent e-mails he confirmed that he had drawn it incorrectly. It is quite some time since I wrote my applications so can't really comment on the completeness of it but it looks quite simple. **END**

The flow diagram for the ROM search routine when using the DS2480b chip for searching for devices on the 1-Wire bus



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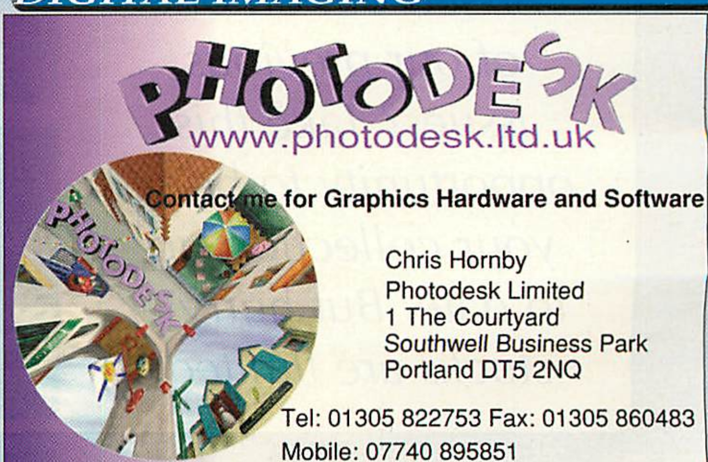


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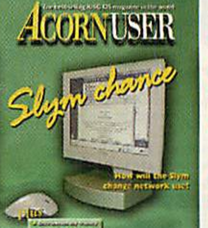
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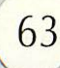
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Revisionist

I have been a subscriber to *Acorn User* for as long as I can remember and have back copies to 1997. It was interesting to read Andy Burgess e-mail in the December issue with the suggestion of a beginner's guide. It is not so much a beginner's guide that I want, more a revisionary text outlining all that's possible on the RISC OS machines.

I remember some years ago when I upgraded to a new machine Acorn enclosed a small A5 colour booklet detailing their different machines, the accessories and what they could do, and the different types of software that could be used. It provided a sort of vision as to how you could, through time, build your system up.

Perhaps something of this sort could be prepared and supplied with each machine and also as a separate item.

David Heatherington
by e-mail

This certainly sounds like a good idea though it is trickier now with the different types of machine that are available: After all you can get the Acorn-badged machines that will take podules, and newer machines that won't — but might take ISA or PCI cards or even have a USB port.

And that's just the hardware — although admittedly the software is less of a problem since pretty much all software will run on the new machines. It is a good idea and something that RISCOS Ltd should be responsible for.

Trawling for reminders

Acorn User through its articles, reviews, hands-on and advertising features provides this service but understandably it has to be at the cutting edge of the technology, whereas I am often trawling back through the magazines to meet a need that was described months ago.

I have found the RISCOS Products Directory on the Internet very useful and I wondered whether *Acorn User* could produce a database of articles from previous issues to make searching back-issues less time consuming. I'm sure that if I could more easily access information about products I would do more to make full use of my RISC OS machine.

While more than happy to continue attending any RISC OS User Show that I can get to, the latest exhibition, left me feeling a trifle uneasy. Depending on who you consult, RISC OS is either dead, dying, or alive and flourishing, albeit in a low-key fashion.

The high point of the RISC OS User's year, is (or was) the computer shows, Wakefield in the North and this year Bletchley for the rest of us.

This year's October Extravaganza, occupied part of the Blue Mountains Golf course and Conference Centre's premises at Binfield in Bletchley, situated approx. seven miles from Reading.

Well, not very well attended by the cognoscenti, an ageing but well informed segment of the British Computer scene, but regrettably representing less than the full spectrum of RISC OS user interests.

Where were the next generation of RISC OS users or the software to interest either the Game playing fraternity or the education sector? I am not saying that these were completely unrepresented, but compared to shows of only a few years ago, when a score or more of producers and vendors competed for our attention in each of these areas of interest, not a very impressive showing.

Where were the technical experts which used to frequent the stands of some of the larger dealers stands, each of whom could keep punters patiently queuing for attention, in the hope that enlightenment would be forthcoming?

Theatre presentations used to be about innovation or consisted of neatly rehearsed demonstrations professionally performed, and not just amusing comments about Wintel, or enthusiastic apologies for products long expected but still not ready.

I know that RISC OS is lovingly supported by organisations whose sales and service is legendary, but the clock is ticking, and we do not seem to be making much progress. Where were the promised new machines or even the upgraded operating system hinted at a year earlier?

It wasn't all bad news — I did not really mind travelling for more than two hours to get to the show and a similar length of time to get home. I did not even mind the confusion about the shuttle bus service. The chance to renew old acquaintances, together with the available bargains compensated in no small measure.

But RISC OS needs new blood in order to ensure survival. We desperately need new machines that match or exceed the Wintel and Apple hardware in terms of speed and capacity. Even more urgently we need new software — Cerilica *Vantage* offers some hope, but we need other software of equivalent quality. We need High Street dealers who know we exist. Magazine support from publishers who can appreciate what is possible, and are prepared to sing the praises of RISC OS in magazines like Personal Computer World, or PC Plus alongside so called mainstream technology.

Perhaps this is really a plea to those who regularly pontificate on what RISC OS needs in order to evolve. Stop looking inwards. Take



writings

a more provocative stance. Time to start writing to PC and Macintosh magazines to remind their editors that we are still here. Take time to walk into PC World, Dixons or other local computer store, and enquire why they are not supporting our platform. Contact the software companies like Adobe or IBM Lotus or Macromedia and ask when we can expect to see RISC OS versions of their flagship products.

If we do not ask the questions, there may come a time sooner than we expect, when we no longer have dedicated computer shows to attend. If we are to have a future we need to get back to where we were four or five years ago, like I mentioned earlier, "I have seen the shape of the future, as it was, if not yesterday, then certainly a day or two earlier.

G T Swain
by email

There is no doubt that we do need to shout louder and not be embarrassed about owning RISC OS machines. However I would say that there is little point writing to dedicated PC and Mac magazines — at least don't expect to get anything published — just as we don't do features on PC software or Mac software alone though they may get mentioned, they won't talk about RISC OS in isolation.

You may notice that articles in Acorn User *mention PCs and Macs when it is appropriate to do so for comparison and then it is because the author knows enough to make that comparison. But you won't find that situation very often in any author writing for a PC magazine, they don't know RISC OS therefore they won't mention even in comparison.*

High Street dealers won't stock machines unless they have a good reason to think they will sell a lot of them, and that will only happen if RISC OS products were backed up by multi-million pound TV advertising budgets and a massive PR campaign.

Again that doesn't mean you shouldn't go into a shop and ask for the latest RiscStation or Acorn machine. But you have to do it cleverly and be surprised when the ignorant shop assistant doesn't know what you mean. And then when they want to show you the latest HP machine, ask them whether it runs RISC OS.

Of course if the person is knowledgeable all you need to do is say "Oh, you mean you haven't heard what's happening?" Sigh sadly and walk away. It will drive them nuts wondering whether there is something they don't know about.

Mr Bill Box-shifter

I was recently browsing in PC World (sorry) and came across the shelves of empty boxes marked "Windows XP. Reserve your copy now, pay a deposit, pay the full price etc." This e-mail predates the actual launch date. So I had a look, having read some good reviews (phrases like stable, self-fixing seem to be features) in the PC press.

What caught my attention (in fact I was gobsmacked) was the PC spec information, particularly the recommended HD installation of 1.5 GB (yes that's 1.5Gig). Now I presume there are lots of "goodies" as well as the OS, but that's bigger than my Risc PC hard disc! How long before it comes on DVD?

Paul Ratten
by e-mail

States of play

I've recently taken up a subscription to *Acorn User* after having bought the occasional mag from newsagents in the past. I am a little disappointed that there are no longer any cover discs — as this was one of my principal driving forces in buying *Acorn User*, and there doesn't seem to be that much on the Online CDs.

I appreciate that the current Acorn market has contracted a little, but am very pleased to see all the adverts for companies still selling Acorn products, and that rather than completely evaporating, the Acorn market is beginning to re-expand. I had been in the 'wilderness' thinking that with Acorn Computers closing their business, this would make the market for these 'real' computers disappear.

In (what I thought) would be a vain hope I started posing a few questions on the Acorn newsgroups which had been pre set up by my *Voyager* software and was amazed at the amount of support and information for the Acorn still out there. Through that I have made some good contacts, and feel rewarded that I wasn't the only one not to have deserted Acorn.

I program PCs for a living, and through this I am greatly aware of their shortcomings. Microsoft *Windows* is an incredibly awkward and unwieldy operating system, and Microsoft *Word* is possibly the hardest 'pseudo DTP ' program I've used — it even struggles with the simple things. Throughout my working day I am lamenting not using a reliable operating system like RISC OS, and I have never before sworn at computers like I swear at PCs!

I learnt to program in BASIC on the family's BBC Micro Model A (upgraded to 32K), and received a perception of how a computer system should work after that. Apart from an extremely flaky first BBC Micro which we replaced I have had next to no trouble with Acorn systems.

Envying the early pricey Archimedes series, the next family computer was a BBC Master to which I added a PC 80186

Emulator board and took the memory to the dizzying heights of 512K. It wasn't until I was working for myself that I could afford to buy one of the Archimedes series — an A3010 and my first experience with a mouse!

I upgraded that with the local Acorn dealer's hard disc kit — HCCS Micropodule system and fitted a Digitiser. Are any of these still around? I then moved 'down south' and a colleague at work offered me a Risc PC which I bought from him in instalments. He subsequently abandoned Acorn and is exclusively programming PCs.

I fitted my Risc PC with a switch box in order that I could share monitor and keyboard with other PCs I had. One day on switching 'live' between PC and Risc PC — the Risc PC just hung. I tried rebooting but nothing happened. "Oh no! I've lost my only decent computer!" I thought. I enquired on the ARM club support e-mail address and to my amazement somebody who'd helped me before responded saying to contact a company called Reflex Electronics.

They part exchanged my motherboard for £95 and returned it to me within two days — just before Christmas. I also bought a second-hand A7000+ as a back-up machine for £150 (complete with keyboard and mouse) from Steve Picton at IFEL (**www.argonet.co.uk/ifel**) who occasionally sells second-hand Acorns — and did sell some A3000's for £20.

I now link all my machines through the switch box (but switch each off before switching — to avoid damage) and use STD's PS/2 Mouse connector which is brilliant.

I would like to suggest that you have a beginner's guide to the ins and outs of RISC OS. I (and possibly others) missed out on learning the basics on RISC OS due to late purchases of A3010 and Risc PC. I have tried trawling through old issues of ARM Club magazines and found some gems, but know there's still more. I remember avidly typing code in from Beebug magazines.

I would also be willing to write an occasional PC vs Acorn article (with an obvious Acorn bias) and/or basics (that I know of) of RISC OS. If you'd be interested — let me know! I am still totally committed to the Acorn — I have only one real criticism of RISC OS — that it has no keyboard support as standard — Windows can be used through the keyboard, but RISC OS cannot without other software — but compared to Windows it is so easy to use.

Andy Burgess
by e-mail

Thanks for the kind words and I am pleased you found your way back into the market. The loss of the cover CD has been compensated by the addition of the Tekkie Pages on the Acorn User Web site. The inclusion of the past CDs was only a temporary measure.

The Tekkie Pages will slowly build, with new material every issue, into a resource containing programming tutorials at all levels — plus programming details that you won't find anywhere else. Soon to be included are full details of the USB interface from Simtec and never before released information about programming the Windfall graphics card.

We will make it up to you.

One previous owner

Michael Stubbs' point about old Acorns soldiering on and taking money away from today's dealers is a tad unfair I think. Every computer type needs a second-hand market — that's a sign that the brand is healthy. I believe Acorn's active second-hand market is a Good Thing overall, but the lack of new toys to buy is more of a problem.

I've got money sitting in my bank account waiting for a new Omega or something to spend it on — my current machine is of a good spec and nothing less than an Omega is worth bothering with. If RISCOS Ltd want a bit of commitment — per Jimmy Imosi's e-mail — well then they can have about three grand's worth from me, but it's waiting for something for me to spend it on. I'm doing my bit for the Acorn market — but like a lot of others I'm waiting for the new merchandise to actually appear before I can do any more.

Simon Smith
by e-mail

Your point is well taken however that only applies to those who have upgraded pretty much as far as they can and there is nowhere left to go apart from to something radically different – though you may find that the Omega is not what you aim for a few days after receiving this magazine. There may be something very interesting at the ARM Club's Midland Show at the National motorbike Museum on 1st December. Let's hope that Royal Mail manages to work fast enough to get this magazine to everyone in time.

Anyway back to the subject: The main problem, and one being addressed by APDL with its BBC Micro-price Mico, is those people who insist that they cannot upgrade machines of the ARM2, ARM250 and ARM3 period to something new, fast and expandable.

APDL have one approach, both RiscStation and Castle have the finance approach which can give you an up-to-date machine for £5 per week. And once a person has taken that step the new world of exciting software and even the Internet become worthwhile.

Yes you can buy secondhand machines and (unfortunately?) Acorn computers tend to last very well and so make excellent secondhand machines – but with the size of the market such as it is, it is damaging.

We can look forward to a day when this is not the situation but right now this is what we have.

END

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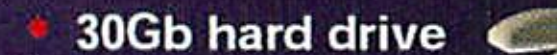
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